

Migration in South Asia

Poverty and Vulnerability

SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability Report

2020



South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication

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**South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication
(SAAPE)**

Migration is a global phenomenon today. It is at the centre of political crises across countries in the developed and the less developed world. In a regional context, in most South Asian countries, the presence of the migrant is ubiquitous. Nearly one in every three persons in India is a migrant, going by the Census definition for migration in India. In Pakistan around one in six urban dwellers is a migrant. Similar statistics for migration are found in other South Asian countries. The issue represents a developmental challenge in these countries. It also represents a potential threat to internal peace within countries, and between countries in South Asia. In the context of political enmity in the region, the issue of 'illegal' migrants often becomes a flashpoint to internal peace and an area of conflict between countries.

The attempt in this Poverty, Vulnerability and Migration Report is to understand the underlying causes of the migration of the poor, from both within a country as well as from a regional perspective. While all issues concerning migration might not be covered comprehensively, the authors feel that the most important drivers of poverty and migration have been substantially highlighted and discussed. The focus being on poverty, the report does not seek to discuss migration of the relatively better off.

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Acronyms

BSUP	Basic Services to Urban Poor
CAB	Citizenship Amendment Bill
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DBT	Direct Benefit Transfer
EGP	Employment Generation Programme
EPF	Employee's Provident Fund
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
ETF	Employee's Trust Fund
FBR	Family Background Report
FEDO	Foreign Employment Development Officer
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GST	Good and Services Tax
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IHSDP	Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISI	Indian Statistical Institute
JSY	Janani Suraksha Yojana
KEP	Karnali Employment Programme
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MSP	Minimum Support Price
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLSIU	National Law School of India University
NRC	National Register of Citizens
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PSPS	Public Servants Pension Scheme
PUCL	People's Union for Civil Liberties
SAAPE	South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLBFE	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Foreword

"Abject poverty, political instability, torture, and other abuses push thousands across our border. There is not a deterrent imaginable that equals the conditions that force their migration."

- Greg Boyle

How many kilometres are you prepared to walk to flee hunger? For many South Asians, no distance is too great to escape their economic and social deprivation. Thousands are marching every day, both within and beyond the frontiers, to eke out a living. Despite the old history of migration in the region, today's unprecedented exodus is shocking. In almost all the countries in South Asia, a multitude of reasons that include rural distress, natural calamities and socio-political tensions force increasing numbers of people to migrate, either to urban centres within the region or to other far-off destinations in Asia (e.g. Gulf countries) and beyond. Most of these migrants who are forced to opt for migration, often find themselves relegated to the ranks of the precariat in their destinations.

No wonder, each day around 2,000 farmers, pushed towards the brink of abject poverty, migrate to cities in India, swelling the ranks of the precariat. About 1,600 workers leave Nepal for foreign employment each day, joining the ranks of millions overseas. These figures exclude migration to India, which is scarcely registered formally. Today, half of all Nepali families rely on financial support from relatives abroad. Bangladesh, already grappling with the Rohingya crisis, now faces a devastating migration problem, as hundreds of thousands face an impossible choice between battered coastlines and urban slums. With the urban population growing at a rate of three per cent a year, Pakistanis are flocking to cities faster than any other country in South Asia. By 2030, more than half of Pakistan's projected 250 million citizens are expected to live in cities. Sri Lanka has seen a tenfold increase in migrant numbers in the last two decades, and current estimates suggest that about 1.7 million migrants work abroad, with an annual outflow of about 200,000 persons. The prospect of rising sea levels will drive hundreds of thousands of Maldivians to an unknown destiny. Moreover, there are millions of refugees, asylum-seekers, development-induced displaced people and others, who are forced to move from their places. The region has also witnessed imperialist occupations, conflicts and civil wars, forcing displacement and expatriation of a high magnitude.

In a report, the ILO observes that from 2000 to 2010, the number of migrants from South Asia more than doubled, with an increasing number of women also moving independently. Acknowledging that migration is a crucial livelihood strategy for those who leave since remittances from their earnings enable those who stay behind to make their ends meet, the same report concedes that "in receiving economies, migration is often characterized by high risks and poor employment conditions. Inflows of migrants can generate downward pressure on wages, sub-standard working and living conditions, and create the conditions for forced labour."

Migrants are a lot more disadvantaged than non-migrants and face additional discriminations in countless ways. There are numerous reports about their inadequate wages, poor and unsafe working environments, squalid living conditions and the heavy burden of work owing to their migrant status. Often, they are denied access to social security measures, including food and health programmes. They are subjected to prejudicial treatments, harassment, violence and ostracisation when they move to socio-culturally different locations. These vulnerabilities increase manifold if they are deemed to be illegal or unauthorised.

The current edition of the SAAPE's Poverty Report—sixth in the series—takes note of the fact that economic growth in the region has not stemmed desperate migrations. South Asia continues to witness an increasing rate of migration—both internal and external—over the past three decades. These two categories of migration might have internal dynamics of their own, but the significant overlaps between these two streams cannot be discounted. The poor and vulnerable are compelled to move at an alarming pace, most of which are undocumented, across the region. Already at the receiving end, they are welcomed with precarious jobs in the labour market, to fill up its lowest strata. Acknowledging that migration is the last resort and a coping strategy for these categories of population, the report notes that mitigating the issues of unemployment and underemployment comes at a cost. Remittance inflows are certainly an important source of income for migrant households and the source countries, palliating questions of extreme poverty but not without contributing to growing inequality and vulnerability.

These vulnerable migrations have their clients. Migration ensures a steady flow of cheap labour at the destination, affirming accumulation and growth. Employers favour migrants since it is flexible, easy to control, unorganised and bargain-priced. Usually employed in the informal sector, they can be employed 'flexibly' – without basic rights and decent working conditions. They are paid lower than the locals and also, often, lesser than the minimum wage and are forced to work in sub-human conditions, in gross violation of all labour laws. Migration also has its gender dimensions with women's migration having its associated risks and perils. Female migrants, including the refugees and the displaced, are at a much greater danger of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking. Though highly skilled women are comparatively better-off, most women are employed in low-skilled jobs. They are more exploited and work in less-regulated and less-visible sectors than male migrants.

In the above backdrop, it is important that the latest report of SAAPE chose to analyse poverty, vulnerability and inequality through the lens of migration to understand their interconnections from the perspective of the most vulnerable sections – the migrants. It looks at the underpinnings of the economic crisis in rural areas, which are the cause of rural to urban migration of the poor. It underlines issues confronting women and socially disadvantaged migrant workers, further seeking to relate the labour and economic exploitation of these sections to the capitalist project of surplus extraction. The issues of refugees and the displaced populations and their predicament— both at home and away—are taken to see the inter-linkages between human destiny and the larger political structure. The report attempts to unmask how poverty and inequalities and vulnerabilities induce migration and how the latter two reinforce the former, creating a vicious cycle.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the predicament of the migrants, and their utter distress is emblematic of our collective suffering. The additional chapter on the pandemic's impact on the migrants in the region serves as a testament to issues discussed in the previous chapters and is an indictment against South Asian states and the prevailing order. It is also a glaring reminder of how society deals with those hands that toil for its prosperity. This section also attempts to draw

the attention of the authorities and the policymakers about the need for serious institutional reforms to safeguard the interests of the migrants in particular and the toiling masses as a whole.

This report, which is based on insights and inputs gathered from various country reports, is hoped to cater to the needs of local groups to understand their own economic and self-determination struggles from the vantage of pan-regional struggles for economic, social and democratic rights. The report attempts to highlight that the migrant is, therefore, central to the modern experience of urbanisation. It holds up a mirror to urban existence for the poorest, highlighting the effects of increasing inequalities on the working people, as also all other sections of society. The study of working people from the vantage of the migrant helps throw light on the contradictions that accompany and drive economic development in rural and urban societies. Hopefully, this study, therefore, will afford an understanding of the mechanisms of poverty in the countries of South Asia, and raise the issues specific to an understanding of working peoples' concerns and struggles at the local level, while also helping to extend the cross-national discernment of the particular drivers of economic exploitation.

I am hopeful that this report will be useful to people who wish to resist this inhuman social structure that produces such unprecedented vulnerabilities and also strive to change it. A quest for a better world involves the elimination of poverty and systemic inequalities. I am also confident that it will evoke interest and spark debates within the society for a better understanding of the problem and its resolution.

Sushovan Dhar

(For SAAPE team)

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SAAPE is a regional platform for the South Asian like-minded peoples and groups, formed in the year 2001, to focus attention on “relations of poverty with politics and human rights”. Over the past nearly two decades, the platform has worked with regional groups in the SAARC countries to raise issues concerning inequality and poverty, democracy and peace in the subcontinent. One of the significant initiatives of SAAPE has been to bring out a triennial Poverty and Vulnerability Report in South Asia, accompanied by Country Reports from the SAARC countries. Five Poverty Reports have already been brought out to date, starting with the first report in 2003. The Sixth Poverty Report focuses on the issues of Poverty and Migration, in editorial participation with academics from Ambedkar University, Delhi; Gauhati University, Assam; and Institute of Public Policy, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, India. The report covers eight South Asian countries— Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

This report is an outcome of a detailed exercise of discussions and collaboration with academics from South Asian countries. Country reports by various country authors substantially contributed to the regional report with data and analysis. We acknowledge the contribution of the country authors: Mirwais Parsa from Afghanistan, AKM Mustaque Ali from Bangladesh, DNS Dhakal from Bhutan, Babu P Remesh from India, Azim Zahir from the Maldives, Keshav Bashyal from Nepal, Ammar Ali Jan from Pakistan and Chandima Arambepola from Sri Lanka. The full texts of the country reports are available on the SAAPE website at <https://www.saaape.org>, and the abridged versions of all eight country reports are here in the report. The inputs, suggestions and comments received from the country authors on the first draft of the regional report were also very crucial in shaping and finalising this report.

A conference on ‘Migration in South Asia: Poverty and Inequality’ jointly organised by SAAPE and the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), was held on 24-25 February 2019. Participating in the conference, academics, activists and professionals from India and abroad perused the topic, and the discussions provided valuable insights and analysis about how the migration of the majority in the South Asian context is deeply rooted in poverty and inequality.

Five Editorial Board meetings took place from the conceptual phase to the finalisation of the regional report. We express our sincere gratitude to our Core Committee member Sushovan Dhar, who provided his intellectual support in the capacity of a member of the Editorial Board and supported organising two editorial meetings in Kolkata, India. We are also thankful for his help in crafting the Foreword section of the report. We are grateful to our Advisors Shobha Raghuram and Babu Mathew for providing their inputs from the conceptual phase and helping in organising an august gathering of academia, activists during the third Editorial Board meeting held in Bengaluru, India.

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4 September 2020

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Executive Summary

Migration is a big challenge to governance and policy-making across the globe. It is collateral to the industrial growth-led model of economic development that leads to rural distress and urban growth and consequently large rural to urban population shifts. Policy measures, in most cases, are grossly inadequate to meet the needs of these extensive demographic transformations. While the challenge of migration within national borders and across countries has existed historically, the pace of modern development has accelerated both the incidence of migration and the scale of problems associated with it.

While migration is also a result of people seeking better economic opportunities, among the poor, this is primarily a survival strategy. Poor people migrate because of a crisis to the survival of their families and communities. Rising inequalities, destruction of livelihood options, war and conflicts, climate and environmental crises are all major drivers of migration. While the poor are forced out across state and national borders, they often face hostility in their migration destinations. They have to face up to the loss of democratic rights, absence of any social security protection and the loss of a protective community. State policies are often ambivalent in dealing with migrants – both legal and illegal. In the absence of measures of protection, the migrant becomes a vulnerable individual, open to economic and social exploitation. The most vulnerable sections are those who are weakest in traditional societies – often women and children, religious minorities and the socially disadvantaged. However, while accounting for the vulnerability of migrants, it is also important to acknowledge that migrants also have the agency that interventions addressing migration need to balance agency against any coercion in the migration process.

The connection between poverty and migration is axiomatic. The present global era of neoliberal economics has resulted in the acceleration of this phenomenon. Neoliberal policy leads to growing economic inequalities, with consequent impact on the ability of poor families to sustain themselves where they are. Poverty and a lack of opportunities force the poor to move in search of new opportunities for sustenance. At the same time, the retreat of the state from pro-poor public policy and support measures in a neoliberal regime also increases the precarity of the migrant worker and his/her family, either living with him or her or left behind. Often, the ruling political regime tries to lay the blame of poverty and inequality on the influx of migrants, thus deflecting the anger of the deprived to the hapless migrant. Globally, there has been a rise of majoritarianism and xenophobia, targeting the migrant as the “other” to be reviled. We can see this rising hatred in society, in the political developments in the developed countries of America and Europe, as also in our neighbourhood in South Asia. In an era of globalisation of capital, there is a hardening of borders to the free movement of people.

Migration is a global phenomenon today. It is at the centre of political crises across countries in the developed and the less developed world. In a regional context, in most South Asian countries, the presence of the migrant is ubiquitous. Nearly one in every three persons in India is a migrant, going by the Census definition for migration in India. In Pakistan, around one in six urban dwellers is a migrant. Similar statistics for migration are found in other South Asian countries. The issue represents a policy challenge in these countries. It also represents a potential crisis to internal peace within countries, and between countries in South Asia. In the context of political enmity in the region, the issue of ‘illegal’ migrants often becomes a flashpoint to internal peace and an area of conflict between countries.

An understanding of migration is critical to an analysis of labour and poverty, and labour struggles in any region. It is equally critical for an understanding of urban society and the struggle for sustainability and democracy. It is a challenge faced by different state regimes, with varying responses and differing impacts on society. This analysis has to be at the core of any fundamental understanding of societies in transition.

The attempt in this report is to understand the underlying issues of migration of the poor, from both a country and regional perspective. While all issues concerning migration might not be covered comprehensively, the authors feel that the most important drivers of poverty and migration have been substantially highlighted and discussed. Since the focus is on poverty, the report does not seek to discuss migration of the relatively better off.

Chapter 1 briefly lays out the context for seeking an analysis of poverty and migration.

It explains the focus of this report, which is an analysis of migration and poverty in South Asia, being brought out by the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE). The convergence between poverty and migration is endemic across the world, particularly where there is growing urbanisation along with rural income disparities, and increasing income inequalities within societies. Environmental degradation and climate change and their impacts on lives and livelihood of the poor also force people to migrate. The pressure of poverty and migration is particularly acute in situations where neoliberal policies hollow out social protection, weaken democratic institutions, and often lead to chauvinist 'othering' of large sections of society.

Within South Asia, the history of migration is not new. People migrated for reasons of trade, livelihood, marriage and various other socio-economic factors. However, the hardening of borders and increasing regulation on movement of people meant that migration became more restricted. Nation formation in the region was accompanied by violence and conflict that affected large sections of the populations. The impact of this violence continues to shape politics in the new nations and have effects on both internal and cross border migration. The worst affected are women and children, who are forced to bear the double burden of poverty and social oppression. In a situation where nearly a third of the population of South Asia can be termed migrants, the situation of conflicted migration in the region gains importance for political and economic analysis. This is the context for migration in South Asia.

Migration is not an easy choice for the migrant. It is expensive; needs monetary investment and takes time to fit into a new milieu. It is a socially painful process; particularly for the more vulnerable – irrespective of whether they chose to migrate for social, economic or legal reasons. In particular, when migrants cross national boundaries, they face obstacles of hostile legal systems and power asymmetry. The experience of migrants from South Asian countries to the Gulf is replete with tales of atrocities. At the same time, the migrant plays an important role in his or her native economy with substantial contributions to the GDP and valuable foreign exchange remittances. It behoves states to, therefore, ensure that the rights of migrants are protected, both as a commitment to human rights and to encourage economic development.

Chapter 2 gives a broad overview of poverty and migration in the region and discusses these in the context of neoliberalism as the dominant political ideology in the region.

Migration of an individual, internal or international, can be broadly categorised into voluntary and involuntary. The present report primarily focuses on the migration of marginalised segment of the population where mostly the involuntary form of migration takes place. Within the South Asian context, there are three major streams of migration, i.e. internal migration, intra-regional migration and international migration.

One of the major constituents of internal migration within the South Asian region has been that of rural to urban migration to gain better wage and employment and to improve the living condition.

The major migration corridors for intra-regional migration include Bangladesh-India, Afghanistan-Pakistan, India-Pakistan and Nepal-India. India appears to be one of the most important destinations within the South Asian region because of its easy cross border transit and porous borders with some of the neighbouring countries. India also enjoys a unique position within the intra-regional migration scenario because it plays multiple roles as sending country, destination country as well as a transit country. As a sending country, Indians are present in large numbers in countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. As a receiving country, India is inhabited by large numbers of people from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Bhutan who migrated at different points of time. As a transit country, lots of female migrants from Nepal reach India to further migrate to Gulf countries to escape the stringent law concerning the migration of women from Nepal to the GCC countries.

In the context of international migration, there is large-scale migration to Gulf countries to secure better employment prospects. The major drivers of migration in the South Asian region are urbanisation and regional disparities, agrarian and rural distress, climate change, development-induced displacement, socio-political factors and other factors such as demography, improved communication and connectivity, social network etc. Urbanisation along with better provision for work and other livelihood facilities in urban areas has led to massive migration of people from rural to urban areas. Seasonal migration has been a common phenomenon which has further been facilitated by better transportation facilities and communication system. The initial skewed development of the region further leads to lopsided development, adding to the already existing inequalities.

Agrarian crisis or rural distress has been one of the major reasons for rural to urban migration. In the entire South Asian region, a large share of the population depends on the agricultural sector. Crisis in agriculture acts as the epicentre for distress migration. Lots of cases of farmer's suicide have been reported in different South Asian countries. The agricultural crisis is so grave that a report on Indian farmers mentions that 76% of the farmers are willing to do work other than farming and 61% of them are willing to migrate to cities.

The geographic location of South Asia renders several countries vulnerable to climate change. In many parts of South Asia, climate change is increasingly manifested through unbearable temperature, highly variable and unpredictable patterns of rain and an overall increase in the pollution levels. All these are found affecting the poorest of the poor more in the region, by adding to their already fragile and vulnerable livelihoods.

Developmental projects in South Asia have pushed thousands of people out of the village, to join the pool of footloose labour. Examples of such projects include Mangla in Pakistan, Hirakund in India, Kelani Valley railway lines in Sri Lanka and Kulekhani in Nepal. Sometimes, such development projects also push an individual beyond the national boundaries such as the Chakmas and Hajongs from Chittagong Hills.

South Asia is considered as the second least peaceful region in the world. Civil wars and tensions between different religions and communities, leading to persecution of minorities by dominant groups have found fuelling migration of the affected people. Many of the refugees and asylum seekers in South Asia are victims of civil wars and/or socio-political conflicts such as the Sinhalese and Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka, Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, Lhotshampa from Bhutan etc.

Other important factors contributing to migration have been the demographic profiles of South Asian countries where the majority of the population are young and fall in the working-age group. Hence, they fill the labour gap in those countries where workers are scarce. Along with that, improved connectivity, social networking and improved means of transportation have further facilitated the migration.

Where all the aforementioned factors form the drivers of migration, poverty and inequality are the core determinants that eventually shape the migration of the poor. The issues concerning migrants can be categorised into pre-migration issues, post-migration issue and issues of return migration. Absence of right information about the destination regions, employment availability in destinations; absence of reliable institutional mechanisms and institutional credit facilities; malicious practices of recruitment agents and middlemen; fear of trafficking etc. are some of the pre-migration issues faced by the prospective migrant.

Poor working and living conditions, low, irregular and withholding of wages, language and cultural barrier, lack of adequate education, denial of medical insurance and other social benefits, social exclusion and discriminatory treatment, vulnerability to hostility etc. are some of the issues faced in the post-migration period.

Many migrants find it very difficult to come back and settle in their native regions. Financial help during the time of return, provision of institutional credit, assurance of basic social security benefits and/or availability of some basic employment back home are the major issues that the return-migrants often look for.

The state has an important role to play to facilitate migration. It can act as a regulator of migration, as protector of migrants and as welfare-provider to the migrants, who normally lack other fall-back options. It can facilitate informed migration by providing adequate data and directions to prospective migrants and by providing less expensive and safer transit options.

Chapter 3 seeks to understand vulnerability as a determinant of migration and examines the question of women and migration.

The impact and implications of migration on women are considered to be more than men. In all the countries in South Asia, women's shares in internal migration have been relatively high. 'Marriage' followed by 'need for employment' are the major reasons for the migration of women. Domestic work and factory work are the major employment segments that absorb internal women migrants in almost all of the South Asian countries.

International migration is, however, a male-dominated phenomenon. While women migrants from South Asian countries are mostly engaged in the care economy (including domestic services, cleaning, caregiving, nursing and so on) and in low paid factory works (e.g. garment factory work), their male counterparts are mostly working in 'masculine jobs' such as construction works, driving, security work and many other service sector occupations. Patriarchal norms regarding the suitability of certain types of work for women are emerging as the main factors that shape the migration patterns and the feminisation of migrant occupations.

The migration policies followed by various South Asian countries also reflect patriarchal restrictions and traditional norms that discourage or regulate women's migration. Most of the South Asian countries do have some restrictions or directions that control the free movement of women across country borders. From the patriarchal governments' perspectives, the restrictions in policies concerning recruitment and migration of women are preventive mechanisms against trafficking and possible ill-treatment of these women in their destination countries. Though these policies appear to be preventive, it is predominantly restrictive. Because of such restrictive policies, women sometimes resort to illegal means of migrating with the help of illegal agent or traffickers which push women to a more risky zone, often making them vulnerable for physical and sexual abuse.

The irregular channels of migration are undocumented. Hence, there is invisibility of women's migration. Such invisible women migrants are excluded from the purview of the supportive mechanism of the government, making them vulnerable to abuse in the destination country.

Patriarchal norms weigh heavily in shaping the patterns of women's international migration in South Asian countries. With the strengthening of "neoliberal states" in the region, these norms have further become strengthened in recent times.

Many women migrate after their marriage or to facilitate their marriage. The importance attached to marriage and familial concerns in matters related to migration in South Asian societies is largely on account of the underlying patriarchal considerations, based on male-breadwinner and female-follower models. Such patriarchal consideration often restricts independent migration of women without a husband or an authorised escort.

Migration of women is also strongly linked to the poverty levels of their families. The demand for heavy dowry gives birth to practices like the Sumangali scheme in South India. The connection between marriage migration and the labour markets is very important to explore. It has been shown that many women, who move to newer places following marriage, eventually, enter the labour markets in their spouses' native lands. This is visible in case of the practice of bought wives in Indian states such as Haryana and Rajasthan. These cases explain the 'hidden labour migration' behind the stream of marriage migration.

Migrant women are not a homogenous group and thus the issues concerning various streams of women migration vary considerably. Accordingly, it is very important to capture the issues related to the specificities of distinct categories of women's migration such as migration of tribal women to cities for domestic work and migration of rural women for work in factories and informal sector jobs.

However, in all these segments of migration, certain generic issues are common to all the female migrants (from South Asia) such as poor and deplorable living condition, excessive dependence on middlemen, fear of exploitation, trafficking, sex trade and organ trade, mental harassment, fighting the social norms on the notion of purity etc.

Chapter 4 reflects on the political economy of poverty and inequality in South Asia and comprehensively investigates the state responses to alleviate both.

The chapter argues that the worsening state of poverty and inequality is the outcome of the neoliberal development agendas embraced by the states of South Asia. The states in the region have indulged in transferring common resources like land, forest and water to the corporate houses, which have resulted in the phenomenon of accumulation on the part of the rich by dispossession of the poor. At the same time, the states have also pursued populist policies to address growing dissatisfactions among citizens. Populism has also become competitive from one regime to the other. The populist policies, however, have been largely failing to bring common masses out of miseries. An important reason for the failure lies in the fact that the neoliberal economy structurally pushes people to the margin, and the populist policies pursued by the neoliberal states attempt to give temporary relief without touching upon the structural inequities. As a result, people are forced to move out under distress, both within the country and beyond. International agencies continue to focus on common peoples' miseries which force the national governments to initiate schemes and policies to address them.

The state policies addressing poverty have broadly been discussed under the following heads:

- Rural development, livelihood and employment
- Microcredit and financial inclusion
- Cash transfer benefits
- Job guarantee and skill development programmes/schemes
- Universal insurance schemes
- Housing schemes
- Climate change and adaptability schemes

The chapter discusses all those issues in detail drawing substantive examples from the states of the region. Microcredit, for example, has emerged as one of the core strategies to mitigate poverty. In the case of Bangladesh, Grameen Bank has been a credible initiative which has also propagated microcredit as a key to the alleviation of poverty. However, critical investigation reveals that the whole idea of microcredit as propagated by Grameen Bank, too, has been co-opted into the neoliberal frame of politics and policies. Job guarantee schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in India have tremendous potentiality towards the reduction of poverty as well as revamping the countryside. However, framed by the neoliberal regime, the scheme has not been implemented with due sincerity. The issue of inequality has not at all been a concern, as addressing inequality invites questioning the structural issues like ownership and concentration of resources. As a result, while the curve of poverty is in decline, but the curve of inequality is on the rise.

The pandemic of COVID-19 has exposed the myth of inclusiveness touted by the neoliberal development orthodoxies. Poverty and inequality unbounded within hours after the governments had declared lockdown as the core strategy to mitigate the epidemic. Millions of migrants have been forced to come out on street amidst the 'stay home, stay safe campaign', exposing the utter failure of the policies pursued by the neoliberal regimes to mitigate inequality and poverty in the region.

Chapter 5 critically analyses the state responses to migration, emigration and refugees in South Asia.

First of all, it investigates the overall nature of state responses towards those issues. The states in the region do not have concrete legal frameworks on them. The region has not endorsed the international conventions on refugees and migrants. Rather, attempts have been made to address all these issues both through regional, bilateral and individual state efforts. Respective states in the region have created their mechanisms and institutions, but those have been marked by inconsistencies and lack of a comprehensive approach. Growing aggressive nationalist discourse in an environment of enormous social insecurities, now intensified by the neoliberal policies, have created anti-migrant sentiments and attitudes not only against the immigrants and refugees but within the countries against the internal migrants. Exclusive and exclusionary citizenship discourses and practices like the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 in the case of India have created more vulnerability to the immigrant populations. Whereas the countries have formed certain concrete policies and institutional mechanisms for the outbound migrants, very little has been done for the internal migrants. The governments have endeavoured to address those issues primarily through poverty alleviation policies. The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic has exposed the utter helplessness of the state mechanisms to deal with the issues of the migrant population.

With comprehensive analysis on the policies and mechanisms adopted both at the regional and state levels, the chapter shows that the approach on the part of the state towards addressing the issues concerning migration, emigration and the refugees has been both casual and fragmented. The policies on emigrants have drawn more attention than the policies on internal migrants. On refugees, there has been no definite pattern. It has been contingent upon the approaches of the incumbent regimes as well as the bilateral relationship that the two countries enjoy. The affinity of religion, ethnicity and language have played an important role in defining and implementing the policies. Ideology and political pursuits of the incumbent regime also have significant bearings on them. The deep-rooted political rivalry between Indian and Pakistan, with an enormous negative impact on the regional cooperation in South Asia, also contributes towards the vulnerabilities of the refugees and immigrants in the region.

Chapter 6 of the report discusses the impact and implications of COVID-19 on the migration scenarios of South Asian countries particularly focusing an internal, intra-regional and international segments/streams of migration, as well as the issues of refugees and undocumented/illegal migrants, drawing insights from various South Asian countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has immensely impacted the internal migrants, as the crisis caused immediate unemployment and other labour market distortions, including pay-cuts and temporary

layoffs. When the countries of South Asia moved to a lockdown mode, the internal migrants were the first to lose their jobs. The closure of a significant number of factories, enterprises, construction sites and stoppage of most of the service sector activities created a harsh condition for the migrants to face the axe of sudden unemployment. Many of them lost their jobs and many others were forced to agree to pay-cuts, unpaid leaves and temporary layoffs. The poorest of the poor among migrants was the worst-hit, as their job loss was also intensified with acute deficiencies in terms of income, food and shelter.

The panic and miseries faced by the migrants during their homeward journey have been unique and alarming. As there were travel restrictions and suspension of public transport systems, in all South Asian countries, thousands of migrants chose to return to their villages on their own (mostly on foot), without food and basic resources with them. This led to miseries and starvation of thousands of internal migrants. Many of them lost lives during their return journey due to miseries and accidents. In India, by mid-May 2020, more than 100 persons reportedly lost their lives on their way back to villages in road accidents alone.

The massive return of internal migrants to their native villages has resulted in a 'reversal of rural to urban pattern of migration'. In most of the countries in South Asia, there are large numbers of internal migrants. Mostly, these internal migrants are rural to urban migrants who are essentially the victims of 'rural distress', a characteristic feature of most of the South Asian countries. Migration has been a survival strategy for the majority of the rural poor and the flows of remittances from the migrants are crucial for the survival of their dependent families. When the outbreak of COVID-19 suddenly reversed the rural to urban migration flows, its immediate implication for the rural households is the drying up of remittance flows.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown in South Asian countries have hit the poorest of the poor internal migrants heavily, affecting their livelihoods, their basic freedoms and dignity at the destinations.

Likewise, the situation of inter-regional and international migrants and their misery has similar stories. Based on the evidence, discussed in the chapter, it is evident that problems and issues of migrants are not properly addressed by both the sending and receiving countries. In host countries, these migrants had nothing to rely on and thus they often opted for risky journeys to return home empty-handed. As for their own countries, there are no evacuation plans and facilities for testing, quarantine and hospitalisation. Thus, a strikingly visible lack of evacuation plans is evident, which pushed the migrants to the nowhere citizens or stranded people's category, at borders and forced retention camps.

The concluding Chapter 7 tries to bring together the analysis for South Asia, looking at poverty, economic and social inequalities determining the causes and forms of migration.

History bestowed a troubled past to the South Asian sub-continent. The violence of partitions, xenophobic conflicts and religious fundamentalism stood in the way of countries coming together in cooperation and achieving the full potential of growth. The adoption of neoliberal policies since the 1980s largely reversed any possibility of building an equal and caring society in each country and negated the potential for regional cooperation and shared growth. The vulnerable poor in each country, and among the most vulnerable migrant populations are the most affected by government policies that privilege private growth over the public good.

The way forward has to be a democratic revival, where economic growth does not preclude equitable distribution of wealth. This cannot come about within the current social and political paradigm. A fundamental change from below is needed in society, which percolates up to change the status quo of government for the few. The onus for this lies with the people and their representative organisations. People's organisations and social movements have an important role to play if this 'fanshen' in society has to become a reality.

CHAPTER

1

Conceptualising Migration in South Asia

Conceptualising Migration in South Asia

Mohan Mani

"Today the migrant worker experiences, within a few years, what working population of every industrialised city once experienced over generations. To consider his life – its material circumstances and his inner feelings – is to be brought face to face with the fundamental nature of our present societies and their histories. The migrant is not on the margin of modern experience – he is absolutely central to it."

- John Berger and Jean Mohr

1.1 Shifting Profile of Migration in South Asia

John Berger and Jean Mohr in their book *A Seventh Man* (Berger & Mohr, 2010), a significant work on migration in the post-War European society, examined the lives and contributions of migrants among manual workers in England and Germany in the 1960s and early 1970s. The book described migrants from rural Europe arriving in industrialised England and Germany seeking livelihood and being pushed to the margins of society even as their work became central to the capitalist project. The analysis continues to hold considerable importance, not only in present-day Europe but also across the world. An understanding of migration is critical in the analysis of labour and poverty and labour struggles in any region. It is equally critical for an understanding of urban society, and the struggle for sustainability and democracy. This must be at the core of any fundamental study of societies in transition.

The SAAPE Poverty Report, 2020 titled 'Migration in South Asia: Poverty and Vulnerability' attempts to conceptualise migration in South Asia, with specific emphasis on the interplay between poverty and migration in the region, including migrations within countries and across national boundaries. The analysis covers eight South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It seeks to understand the forms taken by migration for different strata of the poor in these countries; the impact that migration has on the poor migrant individual, the family and the community; and legislative and legal frameworks that govern migration in the countries. It seeks to locate discussions within the context of a changing world with changing attitudes towards migrants and migrant communities,

and changing global impacts of economic policies and climate change.

Official statistics concerning various countries suggest a substantial proportion of the migrant population in the South Asian region. In India, according to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) estimates for 2007-08, 29 per cent of the population are migrants (Government of India, 2008). This means that nearly one in every three persons in India is a migrant. Further, migration has been on the increase in and towards urban areas. The NSSO data shows an increase in inter-state migration between 1999–2000 and 2007–2008 in the two urban migration streams: rural-urban and urban-urban. In the rural-urban stream, the percentage of inter-state migrants increased from 19.6 per cent to 25.2 per cent (during this period) while in the urban-urban stream, inter-state migration increased from 19.9 per cent to 22.9 per cent (Government of India, 2008).

In Pakistan, for the year 2013-14, the proportion of urban population is estimated at 36.59 per cent, of which 30.29 per cent is categorised as non-migrant and 6.30 per cent as migrant (Government of Pakistan, 2015). That is to say, around one in six urban dwellers in the country is a migrant. The rural population in Pakistan declined from 62.1 per cent of total population in 2013 to 59.46 per cent in 2017, while the urban population proportion increased during the same period from 37.9 per cent to 40.54 per cent (Government of Pakistan, 2017). In absolute terms, the urban population increased from 69.87 million to 80.72 million. The Pakistan Economic Survey identifies natural population increase, in-migration into cities from rural areas and influx of refugees as the drivers of rapid urban growth (Government of Pakistan, 2017).

The criteria for determining migration in India and Pakistan use the village or town as the unit for measuring migration rate. If we examine inter-district migration rates in the region, they varied in 2001 from 20.2 per cent in Sri Lanka to 14.4 per cent in Nepal, 11.6 per cent in India and 6.5 per cent in Pakistan (Srivastava & Pandey, 2017). These are not strictly comparable figures, considering the fact that the size of a district in India in population terms would dwarf that in Nepal or Sri Lanka. However, the figures show that the overall migration rates in the region are significant.

1.2 Rural-Urban Migration and Urbanisation in South Asian Countries

*Chal Mini Asomjabo, Desherbadodukh re, Asom dese re
Mini, Chabagaanhoriyal.
Kodal mare jemontemon, Patatulakam go,
Hai Jaduram, Phankidiye pathali Asom.*

(Come Mini, let us go to Assam, Our land here is full of sorrow, Assam is a land of tea and greenery. Somehow could hoe the fields, Oh, the plucking work, Oh Jaduram, You deceived me to Assam.)

(Dutta, 2015)

The above folk song is still sung in the tea gardens of Assam by descendants of migrant tea garden workers from far flung states of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. It highlights the vulnerability of the ancestors of current garden workers, their dependence on the Jadurams—the labour contractors—and the difficulty of leading the life of an exile. Songs like this are evidence to the long history of migration in the region, driven by rural distress and hunger and routine social interactions. Thus, for instance, Nepal shared close trade links with Tibet and India, dating back to centuries. Nepali Gorkhas were reported to be found in the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Bashyal, 2019). Tea plantations in Sri Lanka had a large number of Tamil workers brought from India in the 19th century (Arambepola, 2019). The borders of India with Pakistan and Bangladesh are only 72 years old, and before then, people migrated regularly for work and family reasons. However, the earlier migration would have different in one important aspect – the proportion of rural to urban migration would have been significantly lower. The growth of urbanisation and urban populations is a relatively recent phenomenon. We would add that the role of the Jadurams, the labour brokers, continues to this date, and the poorest sections of migrants are routinely exploited for their vulnerability and lack of knowledge.

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 bring out the growing shift in population from rural to urban areas in South Asian countries.

Table 1.1: Proportion of urban population —1960 and 2018

Country	Year	Year
	1960	2018
Afghanistan	8.4%	25.5%
Bangladesh	5.1%	36.6%
Bhutan	3.6%	40.9%
India	17.9%	34.3%
Maldives	11.2%	39.8%
Nepal	3.5%	19.7%
Pakistan	22.1%	36.7%
Sri Lanka	16.4%	18.5%

Source: World Bank (2018a).

Table 1.2: Population growth in 2018

Country	Rural	Urban
Afghanistan	2.0%	3.4%
Bangladesh	-0.2%	3.2%
Bhutan	0.0%	3.0%
India	0.4%	2.3%
Maldives	3.1%	4.9%
Nepal	1.1%	3.7%
Pakistan	1.7%	2.7%
Sri Lanka	0.9%	1.5%

Source: World Bank (2018b, c).

Both Bangladesh and Nepal saw a rapid transformation from a primarily rural economy in the 1960s to growing urban development in the succeeding 50 years. The countries witnessed more than a five-fold increase in the urban population in that period. The marked difference in rural and urban population growth rates continues, with Bangladesh registering a negative rural population growth in 2018, while Nepal has an urban population growth rate more than three times the rural population growth. India's current urban population growth rate outpaces rural population growth by more than five times. The large variations in rural and urban population growth rates indicate a net movement of people from rural areas to urban centres. The extraordinary movement explains the shift in the proportion of population towards cities over the years.

One major reason for the movement of people towards cities is a declining rural economy, no longer able to support the populations seeking to find livelihood support from agriculture and allied rural activities. In India for instance, for the year 2009-10, as per CSO data,

agriculture and the allied sector accounted for 14.6 per cent of the Indian GDP, while supporting 52.8 per cent of employment in the country. Therefore, we may estimate that urban per capita GDP was around seven times rural per capita GDP (Mani, 2016). In Pakistan, the agricultural sector comprises 20 per cent of the national GDP, while supporting 42 per cent of the working population. Therefore, per capita agricultural income may be estimated as only about a third of the non-agricultural per capita income. Further, around 65 per cent of the population of the country live in rural areas, seeking sustenance from agriculture, livestock breeding, fisheries and forestry (The Express Tribune, 2016).

This pattern of rural-urban inequality is evident in much of the region. We see that while the agricultural share of GDP declines, the population continues to be predominantly rural. The consequent crisis in rural incomes exerts pressure on rural folks to migrate in search of employment and livelihood.

Sri Lanka provides a slightly different picture from the other South Asian countries. From Table 1, the proportion of the reported urban population in 2018 is not very different from that in 1960. What is the reason for this seemingly unchanging urban population proportion in the country? One factor could be the relatively low disparity between rural and urban incomes. For the year 2012, the annual median household income was around SLR 42,000 in urban areas, SLR 29,000 in rural areas and SLR 25,600 for the estates (Government of Sri Lanka, 2013). The ratio of urban to rural per capita income was therefore less than 1.5 times. This seems to explain the fact that the rural and urban migration rates are comparable, and the proportion of urban population remained largely unchanged during the period from 1960 to 2018.

The portrayal of the low level of urbanisation in Sri Lanka, however, needs to be examined further. The country is ranked fifth from the bottom in terms of urbanisation from among 233 countries globally, according to the UN's 2014 World Urbanisation Prospects (UN Habitat, 2018). This low proportion of the urban population is inconsistent with the country's rapid economic growth in the last decade, as, globally, high economic growth correlates to high levels of urbanisation. According to the World Bank statistics, Sri Lanka had a per capita annual GDP of USD 4,102 in 2018, more than double the per capita annual GDP for India, Pakistan or Bangladesh for the same year (World Bank, 2018d). In contrast, the proportion of urbanisation in the country is only half that in India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. Why is this so? A key reason according to the UN-Habitat is the definition of 'urban' in Sri Lanka (UN-Habitat, 2018).

The administrative definition of what constitute urban areas in the country result in the exclusion of peri-urban spaces from the urban census. Currently, only those living in Municipal Council or Urban Council areas are counted in official statistics as urban. This leaves out large sections of the population in Pradeshiya Sabha areas, which are often as urbanised. When this population is included, some estimates hold Sri Lankan urban population to be as high as 48 per cent of the total population (The Daily Mirror, Sri Lanka, 2015). This would indicate that the situation of urbanisation in Sri Lanka might not be very different from the rest of the region.

The foregoing analysis also suggests difficulty in getting consistent and comparable data when dealing with issues of urbanisation and migration in the region. Definitional problems about what constitutes urban areas apply to all countries undergoing economic growth and development, with economic development moving from cities to their peripheries and spawning peri-urban settlements. However, what stands out despite the reservations about the definitions of 'urban' and the 'rural' spaces, is that economic disparities exist, exacerbated by different rates of growth in different sectors of the economy. The lowest growth rates are typically seen in the more rural regions. Therefore, the primary direction of migration is towards higher degrees of urbanisation and economic growth.

For the poor, migration is often a desperate search for livelihood and survival. In the cities, migrants provide a reserve army of labour, contributing to economic growth. They also contribute to lowering wages and declining employment standards, leading to competition with local populations for jobs and public services. This can result in hostility directed towards migrants from those who consider themselves as original inhabitants. Migrants are often viewed as outsiders who add to crime rates and disrupt the economic and social patterns of settled societies.

The foregoing discussion raises two issues of concern: first, should rapid urbanisation be seen as desirable in the South Asian context, even when urbanisation is positively correlated with economic growth; and second, are cities geared for systematically dealing with this large rate of urban growth.

Globally, the urban population proportion is estimated to increase from the current 55 per cent to 68 per cent by 2050. India alone is projected to add 416 million new urban dwellers by 2050 (UN DESA, 2018). This rapid urban expansion is, however, beset with its own set of potential problems. For one, it would increase stress on the urban infrastructure, including on housing, transportation, health care and water, and would spur

pollution levels. Crime rates would go up too and so the need for policing which would in turn negatively impact freedom of movement and socialising among people.

The poor, especially the migrant poor, would be the most affected by these stresses. They are likely to be cast to the margins of the urban development process, both metaphorically and physically, tasked with the most menial and hazardous occupations, and pushed into the worst living conditions in the cities. In the award-winning science fiction short story, 'Folding Beijing' (Jingfang, 2016), the Chinese novelist Hao Jingfang describes Beijing in the future, accommodating a population of 80 million, a nearly four-fold increase over its current population. In the story, the city is redesigned and reconstructed to fold into three, with the five million rich occupying the First Space, living under the natural skies with natural sunlight during day time; while the twenty-five million middle-class residents occupy the Second Space and fifty million poor occupy the Third Space, both these sections of the population living under an artificial sun. The residents of the Third Space are mainly descendants of migrant workers who had come to build the new Beijing city. They perform all the hazardous and menial tasks linked to trash and waste disposal and keeping the First Space and Second Space clean. The residents of the three spaces do not share either a common physical or temporal space. The prescient novel describes a dystopian future, where segregation in society is complete. This is a world where the marginalisation and invisibility of the migrant and his descendants have been normalised.

1.3 Involuntary Migration and Displacement

While migration in the region existed from earlier periods, the experience of migration would have been different from present times, particularly in respect to the relative ease of cross border transit. The modern state is much more vigilant in guarding its borders and deciding who can enter the country, for what duration and with what purpose. The hardening of borders in South Asia is also linked to the manner of state formation and the history of pervasive violence and conflicts in the region. The scars of violence that accompanied the formation of the three largest countries in the subcontinent—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh—still impact regional politics and policies. The Urdu writer Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" poignantly brought out the madness of partition that separated India and Pakistan, through the story of a lunatic asylum caught in the administrative chaos of partition (Manto & Naqvi, 2007). In this story, the protagonist who calls himself Toba Tek Singh, an asylum inmate, frantic to return to his native village of Toba Tek Singh Nagar, finally dies in the no-man's land between the barbed

wire fences of the two newly formed countries, the death allegorically raising a spate of questions: what is the meaning of national boundaries; who is a citizen and who an alien; and where, in politically charged and hate-filled environments, does madness actually lie – inside the lunatic asylum or outside? Finally, the death of Toba Tek Singh on the border could itself be seen as a poignant metaphor for the stoppage of free movement of people across national boundaries in most of South Asia.

In a cruel and farcical repetition of this tragic history of partition, the question of citizenship has again assumed centre stage in India, as also in Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka – all countries that are in the throes of majoritarian chauvinism. The civil war in Sri Lanka brought to the fore the economic and political differences between the majority Sinhala community and the Tamil 'settlers'. The war ended in 2009, but the seeds of violence are still not weeded out of society (Arambepola, 2019). The National Registry of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizens Amendment Bill (now, Citizens Amendment Act) have brought to centre stage the definition of citizenship in India (Remesh, 2019). Afghanistan has been the backyard for a decades-long cold war struggle that has torn its social fabric and caused economic devastation. Religion and ethnicity have formed deep divisions that hold back or severely limit any possibility of economic cooperation and social interchange. At the same time, the violence often results in large sections of the population becoming forced migrants from their own homes and communities. An estimated 2.6 million Afghans live as refugees in Iran and 1.5 million in Pakistan (Parsa, 2019). Bangladesh and Nepal are hosts to large sections of displaced people from Myanmar and Bhutan.

There are other forms of violent displacement pushing populations into forced migration. The displacement could be due to 'development' projects or conflicts and political upheavals or disasters caused by environmental and climatic factors. These forced migrations do not have a rhythm to them. They are not guided by past experiences and therefore are more chaotic and stressful. In the modern world beset by uncertainties, these event-induced migrations are increasing both in size and frequency. South Asia has its share of episodic migration events. State responses to forced and violent displacement are often extremely limited and patchy. Most countries, despite being signatories to international conventions on internally displaced people and refugees, in practice have limited intervention to mitigate the trauma of forced displacement. Rehabilitation measures often stop with insufficient financial compensation packages. Money, in any case, is an unsatisfactory answer to the loss of livelihood and community that the migrants have to face.

Violence and conflicts have significant collateral impacts. For one, both internal and cross-border conflicts result in increased spending on defence and security. Within the subcontinent, India in 2014-15 had per capita defence expenditure (at 2009-10 prices) of USD 48.23, as compared to per capita public health expenditure of USD 20.19 and education expenditure of USD 55.13. That is, the per capita defence expenditure was 64 per cent of the country's combined expenditure on education and health care. In Pakistan, the ratio of defence to education plus health care expenditure was 113 per cent; for Bangladesh it was 80 per cent; for Sri Lanka 77.5 per cent; and 46 per cent in the case of Nepal (Mani & Bhattacharya, 2018). We see conflicts in the region result in an arms race, forcing countries to spend scarce resources on defence, which could have otherwise been used in social sector spending. This raises the 'guns versus butter' debate: how much should a country spend on its defence and internal security needs, against spending on social security benefits for its inhabitants? To what extent does the increased defence spending crowd out the spending on public goods? The poor suffer the most from this under spending on social sectors. There is a vicious and reinforcing logic to this: less government spending leads to more public discontent, requiring more government spending on security measures.

Conflicts create and reinforce enmity between communities. The rhetoric of hyper-nationalism engendered by this discourse can lead to a rightward shift in politics in countries. Such shifts curb democratic rights, and inevitably have a negative impact, with the maximum burden borne by the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. These divisions within society form additional and difficult barriers that migrants have to negotiate, both within countries and across borders. They harden religious and ethnic intolerance, and make it difficult for the migrant to integrate into her new life situation or form new community links. There is a permanent 'othering' that accompanies the migrant, forcing him to remain an outsider.

1.4 Linking Migration to Inequality and Poverty

The past few decades have seen a rapid rise in global economic inequality, dividing people into the very rich few and the vast majority of the poor. Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty First Century* (Piketty, 2014) is one of many economic studies that have brought the issue of economic inequality to the limelight of political debate and economic concern. Migration in the twenty first century can also be seen as associated with the growth of global inequality.

Among the South Asian countries, growing inequality is also accompanied by persistently high levels of poverty. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of the UNDP estimated for 2019 the headcount ratio of population in multidimensional poverty as 41.7 per cent in Bangladesh, 27.9 per cent in India, 34 per cent in Nepal and 38.3 per cent in Pakistan (UNDP, 2019). The respective population below the poverty line by the national estimates for each country was 24.3 per cent for Bangladesh, 21.9 per cent for India, 25.2 per cent for Nepal and 24.3 per cent for Pakistan respectively (World Bank, n.d.). The wide variation between the incidence of poverty as measured by the MPI of the UNDP and the national poverty line in the countries is a matter of concern. Evidently, targeted programmes of poverty alleviation would exclude large proportions of the poor in these countries. Many migrant poor would also therefore get excluded from the benefits of targeted programmes. We should caution that the national poverty estimates and the UNDP estimates might not be for the same years.

The income inequality for the period 2010-17 measured by the quintile ratio (ratio of the income of the top 20 per cent compared to the income of the bottom 20 per cent) was around 5.0 in India, Bangladesh and Nepal; the ratio was 4.4 in Pakistan; and around 7.0 for Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Bhutan (SAAPE, 2018). High inequality has a reinforcing effect on poverty. Inequality results in a reduction in demand in the economy; it causes a downward drag on the GDP and consequently on economic and livelihood options for the poor.

The combination of poverty and inequality impacts migration. Given the costs associated, migration is often a solitary act among the poor. The sole purpose of migration is to earn quick money and save as much as possible to repatriate home. The tendency is therefore for the migrant to work well beyond regulation hours, to maximise earnings, without concern for health or wellbeing. In a study of garment workers in India, male, migrant garment workers in the NCR region around Delhi were found to work as much as 100 hours in an average week, with many workers also working on Sundays (Mani et al., 2018). The effect of this self-exploitation can be toxic on both emotional and physical health, particularly if the worker is a migrant and single. The migrant exile, deprived of both the care and the socialising influence of a community, can often turn to anti-social behaviour and delinquency. The surrounding inequalities can spur some on to avenues they see as shortcuts to wealth. This behaviour in turn builds a stereotype, tarring all migrants with the brush of being anti-socials, and evoking hostile reactions from local communities. This is not a phenomenon

restricted to the South Asian region. The developed world, including the European Union and the USA, have all witnessed social and political backlash against migration in recent times.

1.5 International Migration in South Asian Context

Migration is as an important source of foreign currency: for instance, personal remittances accounted for 31 per cent of GDP in Nepal in 2016, 8.9 per cent in Sri Lanka, and 7.1 per cent in Pakistan (ILO, 2018a). External migration therefore receives policy support from governments. There are several issues with international migration, linked to destination and employment choice.

Five of the top ten destination countries for migration from South Asia in 2017 were Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Oman (the GCC countries), and Iran (ILO, 2018b). The oil-rich nations have been traditional employers for skilled and unskilled workers from the South Asian countries. However, conflicts and political strife in the Gulf region have made these destinations less attractive for migration. This has been compounded by the downturn in the Gulf economies with the declining of oil prices and depleting oil resources. The situation has the potential of creating a domino effect in the source countries, with returning migrants needing to find employment in their countries of origin, conflicting with the interests of those who are currently employed in jobs. The decline in remittance income would also impact local economic growth, with consequent negative impact on livelihood options and the overall GDP and current account balance of the source countries.

Cross-border migration within South Asia is often viewed from the lens of the undocumented movement of workers, given the prevalence of hostile relations between many of the countries. This discourse fails to acknowledge the substantial benefits that migrant workers bring to host countries. The example of the Maldives brings out many contradictions in the manner in which migration is viewed in the mainstream political and policy discourse. The Maldives has by far the highest per capita national GDP in the region. In 2017, the per capita annual GDP was USD 10,535, more than twice that of Sri Lanka and four times that of India, Bangladesh or Pakistan (World Bank, 2018d). The main source of income in the country is tourism. According to the ILO, 72 per cent of employment in tourism is migrants. Migrants also make up 88 per cent of employment in construction, 72 per cent in business and financial services and 78 per cent in social services—all areas of employment are related to the tourism sector. The country has an estimated 144,000 migrant workers, 63,000 are categorised as 'illegal' (Zahir, 2019). The country benefits substantially from

the inflow of migrants; however, it finds it beneficial to categorise half the migrants as illegal.

1.6 Migration of Women

Increasing poverty particularly impacts poor migrant women. As per official statistics, the dominant reason for women to migrate across South Asia is marriage. Census data for both India (NSSO, 2010) and Pakistan (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2015) indicates these broad migration patterns. Migration is therefore largely a dependent activity; dependent on decisions by other members within the family. Within the predominantly patriarchal societies, these decisions are generally taken by the men: the father or male family head or the husband. Agency is denied to women to strike out on their own. However, a lack of agency does not mean that women are freed from exploitative relations during or after migration. Migration might rescue women from the shackles of their natal patriarchal community and family structures; however, it often leads to a new set of social ties, once again subject to patriarchal rules. Further, while most women migrate because of marriage, this does not imply that they are no longer job seekers. Among the poor, women need to contribute economically to the sustenance of the family. Such migrating women in all likelihood would become migrant workers in their new places of residence.

Women are also forced to single-handedly take care of the household when they get left behind in the course of migration by other family and community members in search of better livelihoods. The burden of reproduction of labour gets increased, with the woman often the sole wage earner to take care of all expenses while waiting for intermittent remittances to come from their migrant husbands and other family members. Besides, women often have to bear the additional responsibility of the upkeep of the family assets, including agriculture and livestock, if they are rural households.

Industry in its search for cheaper and more pliant workforce has sought to employ women in greater numbers. Feminised work helps to keep wages low, lower employment standards and contain workforce organisation and resistance. The 'scheme workers' in the garment and textile industries in Tamil Nadu in India (earlier, 'Sumangali' – the term has got considerable negative publicity and since been abandoned) are tied to low wage employment, with the promise of a lump-sum payment at the end of a fixed term of employment, touted as saving for their dowry. The migrant women (both inter-state and intra-state) are housed in crowded boarding establishments run by the employers. To the single, vulnerable migrant

worker, this employment with boarding facility might represent security and even a degree of companionship among co-workers coming from distant places, sharing the common sensitivities of a migrant. The work might even temporarily get women out of homes and free them from their social roles. However, this freedom is bound and limited. The woman is expected to return to her 'natural' role of homemaker after work. Further, her new 'freedom' allows greater access for the employer to use her labour-power, allowing longer hours of work and even employment on night shift work.

Men and women from South Asian countries travelling abroad for work are increasingly found engaged in low-paying jobs. Many women find employment in domestic work and caregiving. The employment routes are often tightly controlled by employment agents, who profit hugely from these transactions, and turn a blind eye to the exploitative conditions, including even sexual exploitation. State intervention is episodic and often takes the form of increased restrictions on migration which can have the counter effect of more unregulated migration and trafficking.

The trafficking of poor and vulnerable sections is a large industry, with estimates suggesting over a million men, women and children being trafficked globally each year. Around 20 per cent of them are estimated to be from South Asian countries (Rahaman, 2015). Several countries have strict regulations and punitive laws against trafficking. However, as long as poverty and inequality exist, the movement of people across boundaries will not stop. It will only become increasingly more difficult and expensive for the migrant and opportunities for survival will become scarce. There is therefore a double bind in human trafficking. First, in the absence of any real rehabilitation measures for the 'victims', their release from trafficking often does not address the original issues that made them vulnerable to traffickers. Second, the discourse around trafficking does not recognise any agency among adults who might have voluntarily chosen to be a party to the situation. For them, the 'rescue' from trafficking often serves to make their situations worse.

The exploitative systems of migrant employment for women often have the support of the families of these workers, who benefit from control over their earnings and forced savings. The hold of patriarchy is not loosened even when women migrate out to work. Migrant women do not derive full social freedom or economic agency. The restrictions of a patriarchal society, including the lack of safety for women in cities, serve to constrain opportunities for the migrant women to enjoy the newly gained economic and social freedom. Further, poverty and inequality in societies often serve to intensify the patriarchal hold.

1.7 Migration in Times of Neoliberalism

A common feature across South Asia is the spread of neo-liberalism as the dominant ideology guiding political choice and economic policies in the region. Prabhat Patnaik defines one of the characteristics of the neoliberal state as moving away from "intervention in the economic functioning in the interest of society as a whole" to "exclusively promote the interests of finance capital". Patnaik further states that this moving away is sometimes mistaken as "the retreat of the state", whereas the state is actively engaged in promoting demands of capital through privatisation, disinvestment and reduction of state expenditure in favour of private sector participation (Patnaik, 2010). The effects of this are visible in increasing inequality in society and progressively increasing privatisation of all goods and services, including those services the poorest in the country depends on. The direct impact is of greater precarity for poor migrants.

Neoliberalism progressively gained acceptance across the globe from the eighties, with the Reaganite and Thatcherite eras in the US and Great Britain respectively. Since the nineties, the collapse of the then USSR and the move to a uni-polar world saw the development of a more aggressive form of neoliberalism. The 1990s also saw the intensification of neoliberal policies in the major South Asian countries, with resultant inequalities accentuated by the cutback in state support for welfare. India opened up to structural adjustment programmes (SAP) after the balance of payment crisis in 1991. Pakistan agreed to structural conditionalities under the IMF dictates in 1988 (Ahmad & Khan, 2009). Bangladesh first took a tied loan from the IMF as early as in 1980 (Aminuzzaman, 1994).

The structural adjustment programmes uniformly demanded cutbacks in subsidies to the poor, while opening up the economy to private investment and the markets to global capital. The opening up of the economy meant that large sections of the traditional economy, including those dependent on the use of free common resources such as land, water and forests all came under stress, forcing migration to cities which became the drivers of economic growth and employment opportunities. The provisioning within cities of essential public services, whether education or health care or transportation, is largely inadequate to meet the needs of the large populations they support. To give some yardsticks, the annual public expenditure per capita on health care among South Asian countries in 2014-15 varied from a low of USD 7.8 in Bangladesh to USD 10.6 in Pakistan, USD 20.2 in India and USD 66.7 in Sri Lanka (all at 2009 prices). If we compare in PPP terms, the Indian per capita public health expenditure of USD 20.2 in nominal terms corresponds to USD 353

(PPP), which is less than one-ninth of the public per capita annual health care expenditure of USD 3333 (PPP) in Germany (Mani & Bhattacharya, 2018). We should add here that the model of health care in South Asian countries is increasingly following a public-private partnership model, with the government subsidising health insurance cost to be provided by the private sector. The burden of health expenditure under this model is passed on to the poor. In the absence of universal public provision of health care, migrant workers with the lack of access to proper documentation would be systematically disadvantaged from accessing any government subsidies available within the public-private partnership models.

To take just one metric of comparison for health expenditure and outcomes, as per a study by the World Bank, the maternal mortality rate for live births (MMR) was lowest at 29 per 100,000 births for Sri Lanka as compared to 170 for Bangladesh and Pakistan and 190 for India and Nepal (El-Saherty et al., 2014). The significantly lower MMR rate in Sri Lanka is linked to the historical emphasis on universal and public provisioning in both education and health care (Arambepola, 2019).

Economic growth might accelerate under neoliberalism, as government policy is geared to unleash the 'animal spirits' of private entrepreneurship, to use a Keynesian catch phrase. However, the benefits of economic growth are not equally divided in society. The growth rate of India's GDP increased from an average 4.4 per cent per annum (often termed the 'Hindu' growth rate) in the seventies and eighties to 5.5 per cent in the nineties and early two-thousands, and further to an average 7.1 per cent in the last decade (Gupta, 2018). The period of accelerating growth rate that has catapulted the country today to the top bracket in terms of rate of GDP growth, coincides with the introduction of neoliberal policies and the progressive rollback of the welfare state. The period also coincides with the intensification of inequalities in the country. While rural inequality in India in terms of the Gini Coefficient remained relatively stable, increasing from 0.281 in 1973-74 to 0.291 in 2009-10, urban inequality during the same period increased much more significantly from 0.302 in 1973-74 to 0.382 in 2009-10 (Government of India, 2014). The combination of relatively high economic growth accompanied by increasing economic inequality along with increasing recourse to a neoliberal policy by the governments has been a common feature in countries in the region since the last two decades and more. The benefits of economic growth also accrued more in the urban economy.

Growing unemployment is another characteristic of the neoliberal policies in the region. In Sri Lanka, the overall poverty rate is estimated at around 4.2 per

cent. Significantly, female employment is around 6.5 per cent and unemployment among the youth is 18.5 per cent (Government of Sri Lanka, 2017). In India, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2017-18) painted a bleak picture, with labour force participation rate declining from 55.5 per cent in 2012 to 49.7 per cent in 2018; urban unemployment was 10.8 per cent for women and 10.3 per cent among the youth with more than a higher secondary level school education (Kannan & Raveendran, 2019). The impact of this is the declining of bargaining power for labour, forcing wages down, and the dismantling of labour laws in the name of labour flexibility that leads to poorer standards for social security, working conditions and safety at the workplace. The ready-made garment export industry is an example of the form of industrial development during neoliberal growth.

Garment export is a vital component of the South Asian economies. An estimated 15 per cent of all global exports of apparel to the USA in 2015 were from South Asian countries (The Economist, 2016). The countries are also major exporters of apparel to the European Union. The large-scale outsourcing of work in the global apparel industry intensified after the removal of quota restrictions in the turn of the 21st century.

Together the garment manufacturing industry in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka employ nearly 10 million workers. A sizeable proportion of the workers are women and migrants. The global supply chain in the apparel export industry is able to use its competitive strength and the threat of shifting production across countries to drive down wage and working conditions. In India, the garment wage ranges around INR 8,000 to 9,000 a month. This is 20 per cent below the national poverty line as per the Rangarajan Committee on Poverty (Government of India, 2014). Prevailing wages in the sector in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are estimated to be lower than in India. The garment sector, while creating jobs for women, pays below poverty line wages and drags down working conditions in the manufacturing sector in the region. Given the importance of the sector to the economy, the state is willing to give all possible incentives, including watering down labour and safety regulations. The tragedy of Rana Plaza in 2013 is a poignant reminder of the downward push of export-led economic growth. Over a thousand deaths in the garment factory collapse resulted in a global outrage against garment manufacturing in Bangladesh and this form of sweated labour under inhuman and unsafe conditions, integral to the global garment sector. However, five years hence, it is business as usual for the industry.

The neoliberal paradigm has skewed economic growth in favour of manufacture and trade, and away from the rural sector, leading to urban growth in the

countries in South Asia. Urbanisation also leads to the growth of the infrastructure industry. Highways, bridges, housing, office and factory premises are all necessary parts of infrastructure for urban growth. The construction sector is consequently one of the fastest-growing sectors. This sector being labour intensive also attracts large numbers of migrant workers. Gangs of migrant workers have become the mobile labour force attached to large corporate infrastructure development companies. The migrant workers provide companies with a cheap and pliant workforce. Workers with the large companies are paid the statutory minimum wage and statutory benefits for the construction sector, which in monetary terms often add up to less than the prevailing regional norm for construction wage paid to skilled local workers. In return, the workers in gangs have the security of numbers and are often given space near the construction sites to construct their own shanty settlements to stay in. A secure campsite offers protection and facilitates the migrant worker to move with the work. The campsite can also become a prison, restricting access for the worker with the outside world. In Sri Lanka, migrant workers in the Export Processing Zones (EPZ) are denied even voting rights in their place of residence, thereby denying access to government benefits and subsidies. The EPZs also curtail freedom of association and restrict access to trade union activists to meet workers and carry on organisation work (Arambepola, 2019). Similar situations prevail in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs), which have been mushrooming near larger cities across India.

State response to migration, in particular cross-border migration, also mirrors the neoliberal character of regimes in the different countries. To the neoliberal state the migrant is a commodity, a source for capitalist exploitation and state revenue. Income from migrant remittances from abroad serves to ease the balance of payment situation. Countries therefore are proactive in promoting migration. However, responses to adverse situations often bring out the contradictions, particularly gendered contradictions within state policy. In Sri Lanka, migration to the Middle East became a big employer of youth, with women outnumbering men given the demand for the 'care' sector. The Sri Lankan government proactively sought to facilitate and regulate the outflow of women migrants. The quasi-government Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment was set up as a regulatory body. However, after the execution of Rizana Nafeek, a minor domestic worker from Sri Lanka to Saudi Arabia in 2013, the government was forced to respond to public outcry against government failure to provide for safe migration. The Family Background Report was brought in, banning migration of young women with children, without provision of a 'proper' family guardian for the children (Arambepola, 2019). While the state is

willing to promote migration, it refuses to address the basic needs of safe and regulated employment routes. The response to an adverse situation is a clamp down, reinforcing patriarchal norms restricting women's agency and freedom. We see a comparable situation with respect to the regulation of women's migration abroad in Nepal. Migration is largely through recruitment agencies, with the state abdicating its regulatory role to the private sector. Government response to issues of safety was to enact restrictive laws, banning migration of women under the age of 24 years. No such restriction was placed for the migration of men, even when several cases of safety were also raised in connection with their migration. This has led to the growth of illegal migration of women from Nepal, further distancing migrant women from access to regulatory protection (Bashyal, 2019).

The economic divisions within society, falling living standards and declining access to public goods result in unrest within societies. The neoliberal state, in order to control an unequal and divided society, has to become increasingly authoritarian. However, even this authoritarian state requires social legitimacy to be able to provide a stable political regime. This social legitimacy according to Patnaik "is sought to be acquired by such regimes through invoking a common foe... or by uniting society behind some imperialist project of national pride" (Patnaik, 2010). The common foe is readily available among countries in South Asia, given the violent history they share. Religious antipathy and divisions on language and caste all serve the interest of political hegemony of the neoliberal state regime. The minority and vulnerable communities become the 'other' in political discourse to stabilise regimes and manufacture legitimacy. These create further minefields for migrants to negotiate, whether they are from minority or even from majority communities.

We have several examples of the creation of the 'other' among countries in the region. In Bhutan, the government in the eighties through a new census created seven categories of 'citizenship' with varying rights. Systematic persecution with the retroactive implementation of the citizenship law made thousands of Nepali origin citizens illegals in their own country, with their large-scale evictions. Their proportion of people of Nepali origin in the population declined from 40 per cent to 26 per cent by the end of this coercive exercise of redefining citizenship rights in the country. The redefinition of citizenship rights in India, with the enforcement of the National Registry of Citizens (NRC) in the Indian state of Assam has eerie similarities to the Bhutanese exercise of the nineties. The 'othering' of communities is facilitated by both informal practice and formal constitutional rights in

South Asian countries. Pakistan's Constitution is based on the principles of Islam (Khalid & Anwar, 2018). The Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh states Islam as its state religion. Although is a secular state, the Sri Lankan Constitution gives pre-eminence to Buddhism as its primary religion. While all the countries guarantee full religious freedom to citizens, majoritarian sentiments are part of state policy, both formally in terms of rules and informally as a practice of governance. They allow political parties pandering to these sentiments to capture and retain state power. The recent introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Bill in India is an example of the growing dominance of majoritarian tendencies within politics across the region.

1.8 Migration Scenario: Emerging Concerns

The modern world with its poverty and inequality of wealth, strife and wars, and environment and climate-related depredations, forces large sections of the population out of traditional livelihood choices and pushes them to look for new survival options. We discussed in the foregoing sections how South Asian countries with unequal rural and urban economic development and internal disturbances and tensions, both within countries and across national borders, have given rise to a population in ferment. This ferment forces large proportions of the population to become migrants, within their countries and across national borders. Unequal development in the region also puts pressure on populations to migrate across national boundaries—documented as well as undocumented workers—in search of a better livelihood.

Much of the direction of migration is towards cities, as they offer more work and livelihood opportunities. The economic slowdown, endemic within neoliberal regimes, has led to declining opportunities for capital to invest and grow. Urbanisation and infrastructure consequently become growth opportunities for capital, not necessarily following any natural direction of efficient growth. To cite an example from a major Asian country, the Chinese multi-country Belt and Road project is driven more by a need to feed the huge and underutilised capacities of its infrastructure sector, rather than a drive for the efficiency of capital use. Similar infrastructure projects are being implemented across the region by governments in partnership with the private sector in an attempt to kick start a flagging economic growth. These projects generate temporary employment, while displacing populations and existing livelihoods. It is a moot point whether the projects would lead to sustainable economic activities for the migrants displaced by the projects or those brought in by the economic activities generated. When state

activity is defined by subservience to private capital needs, sustainability often drops off policy imperatives. The creation of increasing and chaotic migration often becomes a corollary to neoliberal policy.

We discussed earlier how the definition of what constitutes urban, as in the case of Sri Lanka, might mask the rate of urbanisation and consequently the extent of urban directed migration within countries. This is also true for other countries in South Asia. Urban sprawl eats up areas surrounding large cities. Development of highways connecting cities also means that the area around the new roads become urbanised. The regions might continue to be defined as rural, while exhibiting many characteristics of cities. This means that the population in that region, who, even when not spatially displaced, could get displaced in terms of livelihood choices. The disappearance of traditional livelihood forces the worker to migrate to a new way of life even when he or she might stay in the same region. Does this displacement also not represent a form of migration, even when the 'victims' might not be spatially displaced?

Migration consequently is a significant determinant of the new labour force in many sectors of both the urban and rural economies, often in oppressive informal and insecure work relations. It provides workers to sectors as disparate as construction, domestic work, agriculture and plantations, and even the lower end of the formal sector like the export garment industry. The migrant workers today include both men migrating in search of livelihood options and women through marriage or seeking to join the workforce. Women and the socially disadvantaged sections form the bottom of the hierarchy in both rural and urban employment. They replicate these patterns among migrant workers in cities and semi-rural towns. The more vulnerable the worker, typically the greater is the exploitative relations he or she is faced with.

The new migrant worker often faces a hostile urban infrastructure that provides very little facilities for the common public good. If the migrant is also poor and socially disadvantaged, he or she has to face the brunt of this hostile environment. When the migrant must cross national boundaries, either legally and voluntarily as a documented worker or illegally as an undocumented worker, or forced through trafficking, she or he faces another set of troubles. These pose ethical challenges to the notions of nationality and citizenship. In an economy ravaged by neoliberal policies of the government, the migrant worker often becomes a convenient scapegoat to deflect the anger among people against the growing impoverishment of their lives. The migrant is viewed as the cause for their misery, not as another victim of neoliberal government policies.

Migration tears the migrants away from their moorings and communities, consequently making them more vulnerable. The act of migration is not easy, as the migrant often has to be able to support himself in a new place without an immediate means of livelihood, while seeking new employment. Studies show how changes in the urban environment in India make it increasingly more difficult for the really poor new migrant to survive long enough to find a toehold (Srivastava, 2011). In Karachi in Pakistan, according to the city Master Plan, the population is likely to increase to 27.5 million by 2020 – that is a three-fold rise in two decades from 1998 (The Express Tribune, 2016). Within the crush of burgeoning urban populations, the ordinary migrant would find survival itself an uphill struggle.

The poorest sections of the population do not have the option to migrate to distant lands to improve their fortunes. Costs increase with distances. Support structures also become increasingly difficult to find. In this context, it is surprising that temporal trends of intra-regional cross-country migration within South Asia show a strong downward trend, declining from 13.81 million in 1990 to 9.65 million in 2015 (Srivastava, 2011). We could speculate if this represents an actual reduction in intra-regional migration, resulting from increased inter-country hostilities and consequent greater policing of borders and a decline in cross-border migration opportunities. On the other hand, hostilities could also be driving migration to illegal and undocumented routes, with the migrants therefore not getting enumerated in statistics. This could be another outcome of the increasing defence and security-related spending in the region.

Many academic and fictional writings on the Asian diaspora address a section of the population who might have little in common with issues faced by the really poor. Migration studies addressing the impact of remittances on economies often look at the higher ends of the migrating populations. The extent of migration of the really poor, limited by their low asset base, is often only the next district or state, or at best neighbouring country, crossing a porous border, bypassing expensive documentation requirements. This section of migrants does not have much to repatriate back to their families. Bereft of a social reference group, the migrant is often forced to join criminal and anti-social activities in his quest for better days. This, in turn distances him further from the society around, reinforcing a circle of alienation, hatred and mistrust.

What is the future of migratory journeys in a world taken over by the depredations of neoliberal ideology on the one hand and the stark warnings of climate change on the other? In simple terms, migration is a

journey from poorer and less developed economies to the more developed, larger surplus generating economies. This was the journey of the ‘seventh man’ of Berger and Mohr. However, in a world where global supply chains disperse production, the requirement of the migrant to move to the job gets limited, as capital finds it cheaper to take the jobs to where the poorest workers are. Consequently, the option of escaping to a condition of better economic options is restricted. Further, when automation makes jobs redundant, workers are reduced to fighting for jobs, while the need for capital for ready access to a reserve army of labour is reduced. A race to the bottom ensues, in terms of wages and working conditions.

Climate change threatens to destroy existing means of subsistence in large parts of the developing world, rendering workers in those regions dispossessed of means of livelihood and sustenance and making it essential for them to move in a desperate search for survival. The consequence is a Catch 22 situation. Workers are being pushed out, but the normal migratory routes are progressively getting closed by government laws and hardening boundaries as well as by the growing xenophobia stoked by capital and the state. Increasing inequalities feed into insecurities and even in the more developed parts of the world, shifting political discourse to the right is creating and hardening divisions in society. This is true for the dominant routes of migration abroad from South Asian countries. For instance, with the declining viability of the Gulf economies that are forcing governments to reserve jobs for the local populations, the most popular and lucrative migratory options are likely to decline in importance. This is also true for inter-regional migration within South Asia, where xenophobic policy measures are closing borders and seeking to deny free movement to the poor. This is even true for migration within the country. For instance, in October 2018, in India, migrant workers in Gujarat, who were from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, felt unsafe after attacks on them and left the state in large numbers (Hirway, 2018).

The current COVID-19 pandemic has heralded a new period in this age of globalisation. While neoliberalism views the pandemic as merely episodic, and awaiting a vaccine to cure it and get back to ‘business as usual’, the likelihood is that such pandemics are here to stay. The last couple of decades saw a series of more localised pandemics raging through various parts of the geography, culminating in this global crisis. The crisis is likely to impact the globalisation paradigm and fundamentally change how work is structured in society. The rights of the worker are already being restricted in different parts of the world, with repressive

governments using the crisis to push their authoritarian agenda. Migrants who find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy will find increasingly restricted avenues to claim their rights.

There are, however, struggles across the globe opposing repressive government machinery, capitalist greed, and neo-conservative and xenophobic forces within society. These struggles bring together disparate visions of a new democracy, a new and more equal society. The political ferment is not likely to die down easily.

This is the context defining migration and relationships of exploitation across the globe, and in the subcontinent. What should be the role of the state and civil society organisations in this context? Do the present state actions help mitigate the causes and consequences of the current situation? Do they, on the other hand, exacerbate the situation for the migrants? What are the challenges posed by the present situation? What does the future hold for poverty, distress and displacement induced migrations? Where do we locate these issues in the larger context of global economic, social and climate crisis? These are questions that need to be urgently addressed.

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CHAPTER

2

Migration Scenario of South Asia: Drivers, 'Core Determinants' and Issues

Migration Scenario of South Asia: Drivers, 'Core Determinants' and Issues

Babu P Remesh

*No one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark*

...

*No one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet hot blood in your belly*

...

*No one would put their children in a boat
unless the sea is safer than the land*

- "Home" by Warsan Shire¹

2.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the drivers of migration in South Asia. Drawing on evidence from the identified eight countries in South Asia, the chapter discusses the major factors that shape migration in these countries. An attempt is also made in the chapter to connect these drivers to larger binding issues of poverty and inequality which are viewed as the 'core determinants' of migration in the region. Apart from this, the chapter also tries to understand the issues related to migrants/migration at different stages: pre-migration, post-migration and return-migration.

2.2. Setting the Context/Priorities

Before discussing the drivers, determinants and issues concerning migration in South Asia, it is important to clarify once again about the categories of migration and migrants that are given priority in this report.

(a) Migration of the 'Marginalised'

Migration can be broadly divided into two categories. The first category is the 'migration of the better-offs for betterment', where the people who are relatively resource-rich (and with better human resource profiles – e.g. highly educated) move from their native places in search of better living standards and for earning higher incomes. The next category comprises those migrants, who are (partially or fully) pushed out of their places of origin due to adverse circumstances – be it unemployment, poverty, resource crunch in rural areas; social exclusion/violence, environmental hazards; and

so on. While the first category of migration is more of voluntary in nature, the second one is characterised by some degree of involuntariness and socio-economic coercions, as the migrants are forced to leave their homelands due to certain compelling reasons. Given the keen concern of SAAPE on issues of poor and underprivileged, the focus of the present report is on the second category of involuntary and forced-out migrants, who are mostly poor and are often from socially and/or economically weaker sections. In the subsequent parts of this chapter, we will be elaborating on the details of distresses, compulsions and dilemmas faced by these 'marginalised' segments of migrants.

Reasons such as the absence of resources, unemployment and so on force the poor to move outside their places of origin - sometimes for a short duration and at times for several years or even for good. Many of these migrants find it difficult to continue in their villages and view migration as a coping mechanism or survival strategy.

(b) Streams of Migration and Refugees

Three streams of migration that are crucial in the context of South Asian countries are:

- Internal migration (migration within a particular country);
- Intra-regional migration (international migration within the South Asian region); and
- International migration (migration beyond the region).

The first category, i.e. internal migration within a particular country, mostly includes those who move outside their native places to destinations within their own country in search of employment opportunities, higher wages and for better and safer living conditions. The ever-increasing flow of rural to urban migration is a major constituent of this stream of internal migration. Alongside this, there is also a continuous stream of women migrants, who move out of their native land after marriage to far-off destinations and eventually enter into the labour markets of their destinations.

¹Warsan Shire is a British-Somali poet, and "Home" is one of her most widely received poems, which was written in 2009, reflecting on her visit to an abandoned Somali embassy in Rome, which was turned as their temporary home by some young refugees.

The second category is the migration within the South Asian region. As per estimates, in 2015, more than 85 per cent of migrants in the region are those who migrated from one South Asian country to another. (Kaur & Kaur, 2018). The region has some prominent migration corridors such as Bangladesh-India, Afghanistan-Pakistan, India-Pakistan and Nepal-India. Given the easy cross-border transit possibilities between India and Nepal, India and Bhutan and due to the existence of porous borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar, India is the most important destination country for migration within South Asia. As per certain estimates, more than 3 million migrants from Bangladesh and more than 800,000 migrants from Nepal are currently in India (Kaur & Kaur, 2018). Some of the major refugee streams from neighbouring countries, such as the Rohingyas and Chakmas, also are found opting India as a major destination.

Pakistan has more than 2 million Afghan migrants. At present, about 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees are there in Pakistan. Informal estimates suggest that around a million more are undocumented/illegal immigrants. As per an estimate of UNHCR, in 2016, there were 67,000 Afghan refugees in Karachi alone (Siddiqui, 2019). There are also many migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh, many of whom work in the fishing sector of Pakistan. There are about 300,000 Bangladeshi and Burmese living in Karachi itself (Jan, 2019). Pakistan also has a large number of Indian populations as a result of the large movement of people between India-Pakistan borders during the partition in 1947.

The Maldives is also home to lots of migrants from other countries in South Asia, mostly from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal – who work in different sectors/occupations, including construction, housekeeping, and security services. India has been a prominent destination of migrants from the Maldives too. But recently, Sri Lanka has overtaken India. By 2015, half of the emigrants from the Maldives are moving towards Sri Lanka (as per estimates of IMO)². Nepal also has a stock of around 100,000 refugees/asylum seekers from Bhutan³. In addition to this, there are thousands of people originally from India in Nepal (who are popularly known as Madhesis).

²Access to better education and health facilities is found to be the prominent reason for emigration from the Maldives.

³ In May 1991, the Royal Government of Bhutan began enforcing the citizenship laws retroactively: intimidating, terrorising and evicting large numbers of the Lhotshampa population. The total number of refugees who arrived in Nepal was about 84,000 by the end of 1993. Due to natural growth in the span of over two decades, their number increased to more than 100,000 (Dhakal, 2019).

Box 2.1: Intra-Regional Migration: Unique Position of India

When it comes to intra-regional migration (i.e., international migration within South Asian countries), India has a unique position. As a sending country, Indians are in a considerable number in countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka (Rajan, 2017).

As a receiving country also, India has a huge presence of migrants from South Asian countries. As per UN-DESA (2018), Pakistan has the highest number of migrants in India (1,095,149). But, as mentioned earlier, this stock of migrants is connected to India-Pakistan partition in 1947. Bangladesh and Nepal are the next two prominent countries. There are millions of Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants working in India, especially in the unskilled jobs in the informal sector (as construction labour, domestic help and so on). India shares a porous border with Bangladesh. As per UN-DESA data, in 2017, India had 3,139,311 Bangladeshi migrants. However, given the large scale illegal or undocumented migration, there is no conformity in terms of the exact number of Bangladeshi migrants in India (UN-DESA, 2018).

Nepal has an open boarder with India, and India is the highest receiving country of migrants from Nepal. In addition to this, there are also migrants from Sri Lanka and Bhutan. Of late, the number of migrants from Afghanistan as well as African countries are also on the rise. As per bilateral arrangements, Nepalis and Bhutanese can come to India freely without following the usual formalities regarding passports and Visas. The number of Maldivians visiting India (mostly for medical and educational purposes) is also increasing in recent years.

Source: Remesh (2019).

Table 2.1: International Migrants in India

Countries	Number of Persons
Bangladesh	3,139,311
Nepal	537,517
Bhutan	6,580
Maldives	197
Pakistan	1,095,149
Sri Lanka	153,643

Source: UNDESA (2018).

The box and table above depict the importance of India in the migration map of South Asia. India also serves as a transit country for migrants from Nepal, who, after coming to India, use irregular channels to travel to other countries (Doherty et al., 2014; Srivastava and Pandey, 2017; ILO, 2018). Following the ban imposed in Nepal on the migration of women to the GCC countries, women used India as a transit country to migrate to the GCC countries. Though the ban was lifted partially in 2003 and completely in 2010, India continues to be the transit country for many migrants from Nepal.

The third stream is migration occurs beyond the South Asian region. Large-scale migration of people for better employment and higher wages to the GCC countries is a usual practice in most of the South Asian countries, especially in countries like India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. This Gulf-bound migration, which started in the 1970s and 1980s, has picked up momentum in the subsequent decades and now have become the most important stream of international migration for countries like India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Along with this, in the recent decades, migration to other countries in Asia (for example, Iraq, Jordan, Yemen, Malaysia) and countries in other continents (Europe, Australia and America) has also picked up momentum. Though a good proportion of these migrants who choose developed countries of the West are skilled professionals, some of them are also found in the category of 'migration of the marginalised'. For instance, nurses, domestic workers, construction workers and factory workers working in far off countries with political tensions are ideal examples of distress migrants who essentially move out for attaining certain basic employment and income security.

Apart from the above three streams, the report also discusses the issues concerning refugees in the South Asian region, as many of the issues faced by them are similar to the issues that migrants encounter.

While discussing forced or involuntary migration, it needs to be clarified that the element of coerciveness and involuntariness can be present in varying degrees in different cases. For instance, following war or a communal tension or a natural calamity, the resultant migration/refugee movement will be fully involuntary. But, when an unskilled worker from rural area decides to move to an urban centre for employment, it can have connections to both push-factors (e.g. acute unemployment and poverty in the rural area) and pull-factors (e.g. the aspiration and willingness of the worker to earn more by moving to urban areas). Nevertheless, in both cases we can see an underlying element of involuntariness and compulsion. To make it clear, these cases are not similar to the case of an educated youth's migration to a city in his/her own country or another

country for higher education, or to the case of a highly qualified professional from a less developed country moving to a developed country for a job, which fetches him/her higher salaries, compared to his/her present earnings in the native country.

2.3. Drivers of Migration

The major drivers concerning migration in the South Asia region include:

1. Urbanisation and regional disparities
2. Agrarian/rural distress
3. Climate change and natural disasters
4. Development-induced displacement
5. Socio-political factors
6. Other factors (demographic factors; improved connectivity and communication channels; social networks)

In this chapter, each of these drivers will be discussed briefly to gain a broader idea of how these drivers shape the migration scenario of a particular country.

2.3.1. Urbanisation and Regional Disparities

In all the South Asian countries, rural to urban migration is the major category of internal-migration. The availability of employment opportunities and higher wages prevalent in urban areas prompt people from rural areas to migrate to those areas. As discussed in labour surplus theories and Harris-Todaro model, expected higher wages/income is a major consideration of the migrants, while deciding their migration to urban centres.

Seasonal migration of people from rural areas to nearby urban centres has been a common pattern of migration in almost all South Asian countries, for the past several decades. With the advent of better transportation facilities and communication systems, these streams of rural-urban migration got further strengthened in the recent past. Along with this, deepening regional disparities within the countries in terms of the degree of urbanisation and availability of employment opportunities have been conducive to rural-urban migration.

During the past few decades, the urban centres (small towns, cities and metros) in the South Asian region have witnessed a boom in infrastructure and construction. These activities provided opportunities for the unskilled and semi-skilled migrants from rural areas. Further to this, there have been growing job opportunities in the urban centres and peripheries as workers in factories, shops and establishments,

ancillary and support services, domestic services, street vending, security services, restaurants and so on. Migrant workers provide the continuous pool of labour for these jobs in cities and towns, contributing to the development of the urban centres. Therefore, the initial skewed development of a region further led to lopsided development adding to the already existing inequalities.

Normally, the opportunities and facilities in the destination regions (urban) will be better or far more attractive compared to the rural source regions. This aspect acts as a pull factor for the rural-urban migration – be it is internal or international. Along with pull factors (better jobs, higher wages and other attractions of the city), push factors (such as, a lack of employment, low income, natural calamities and socio-political tensions) are also found shaping this ‘urbanisation-driven’ migration.

Rural poverty in a way pushes some of the people to migrate in search of better livelihood options, better wages and access to higher living standards. For the poor, migration is often a livelihood strategy. Better prospects for employment and the possibility of fetching higher wages are among the most important pull factors for the migrants. In other words, a lack of employment and secure livelihood options along with poor wages in the rural areas (source regions) compared to those in urban areas (destinations) can be seen as the push factors behind migration in most of the South Asian countries.

Due to large scale-migration (mostly internal migration) of people from rural-to-urban destinations, the cities and urban centres in the South Asian region have swollen considerably in terms of the number of inhabitants. Every day, thousands of migrants reach cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka, Colombo, Kabul, Kathmandu and Karachi, as the moving towards urban centres is perceived as strategy for survival by the dispossessed and depressed from rural areas. People consider the city as the space that provides asylum to all those who come there. Epithets such as ‘Karachi – Gareebon Ki Maa’ (Karachi – the mother for the poor) are reflective of such a view. In smaller countries like the Maldives and Bhutan too, the movement of people towards capital cities and urban regions has become a common feature in the recent past.

In the Maldives about 40 per cent of the population (374,467) resides in Malé, the capital city. Rising inequality is identified as the major reason for the continuous flow of migrants to the capital (Yaegashi, 2012). The poverty levels are highest on the islands

where livelihoods are dependent on subsistence agriculture and fishing⁴. In Bhutan also, there is a similar trend of capital bound migration recently. The following box gives a brief idea of Thimphu-centric migration in Bhutan.

Box 2.2: Increasing Trends of Rural-Urban Migration in Bhutan

In earlier times, Bhutan did not have much rural-urban migration but now is showing increasing trends of internal migration. There were hardly any urban employment opportunities in the past, barring some opportunities in government service or the management of monk bodies. The rural community was content with subsistence living and there were hardly any urban centres in the country. But now, with the concentration of more development activities in Western Bhutan (comprising Thimphu, Ha, Chukha, Paro and Samchi dzongkhags), it has become a more attractive destination for people from the development-neglected dzongkhags in the eastern, central and south-central regions. The major causes for increasing rural-urban migration in Bhutan in recent years include a lack of employment opportunities in rural areas and limited cultural, social and schooling facilities in backward rural regions. As per the Population and Housing Census of Bhutan (2017), rural to urban migration accounted 21.7 per cent of all population born in Bhutan and almost one half of all migrant population (NSB, 2018). As per this survey, the main reasons cited for migration are family reunion (17.8 per cent), employment (12.7 per cent) and education (8.3 per cent). Most of the migrant-receiving districts are in the western region where Thimphu is located. Accordingly, the population of Thimphu Municipality has increased from 16,000 in 1986 to more than 70,000 in 2017.

Source: Dhakal (2019).

2.3.2 Agrarian Crisis/Rural Distress

A closer examination of the rural to urban migration indicates that more than anything it is ‘rural-distress’ that determines the migration of the poor in South Asia. Lack of employment opportunities (declining labour absorption in farm sector) due to a multitude of factors (including growing rate of landlessness, depletion of natural resources, a decline in common property resources, conversion of lands, land grabbing and so on) force the people to leave their natives in search of better employment prospects and higher wages.

⁴As per estimates of the Maldives Department of National Planning (2011), the per capita income in Malé is MVR 6,984 and in the atolls (other islands) MVR 3,421, reflecting the regional disparity.

Essentially, the crux of the rural distress often lies with the crisis of agricultural sector. Due to the non-viability of agriculture, small peasants and landless labour in rural areas are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain their livelihoods. This phenomenon of 'agrarian crisis' is a continuous characteristic of rural India for the past few decades. The escalating cost of cultivation together with price-crash for agricultural produce makes agriculture as a non-viable option. Quite often, crop loss due to bad monsoons, droughts and other natural reasons also add to the rural distress. Inefficacy of governmental intervention (regarding the fixing of minimum support prices, setting up of rural warehousing and marketing facilities and provisioning of institutional credit) is also exacerbating the situation.

In South Asia, as a whole, a prominent share of the population depends on agriculture for employment and livelihood. The crisis in the agricultural sector acts as the epicentre for distress migration. For instance, in Afghanistan, where agriculture engages more than 80 per cent of the workforce, the households whose heads are engaged in agriculture are more under the grip of poverty, as per a recent report of the World Bank, which captures the trends in poverty and inequality in Afghanistan for the period, 2007-17 (World Bank, 2018).

Parsa (2019) points out that people in Afghanistan use mobility as a coping mechanism to resist conflict, natural disasters and food insecurity and livelihoods risks. In 2017, there were 501,000 internally displaced persons in Afghanistan due to conflict and natural disasters. Out of this, 474,000 were displaced due to conflict and 27,000 as a result of natural disasters (IDMC and NRC, 2018). According to a report by the UN, 275,000 people in Afghanistan were displaced in 2018 by droughts alone; 84,000 of in urban areas and 182,000 in the western region of Afghanistan in particular (Parsa, 2019).

Box 2.3: Plummeting Onion Prices and Farmers' Distress in Rajshahi, Bangladesh

The Dhaka Tribune reports the miserable state of onion farmers of Rajshahi in Bangladesh, where even after having a bumper crop, the farmers had to sell their crops at throw away prices. The absence of warehousing facilities and large-scale imports of onion are the reasons pointed out for the steep fall in onion prices.

Source: Abdullah (2019).

Volatile agricultural prices are a major reason that sabotages the rural economy. Many factors such as a lack of warehousing facilities, the absence of support price policies from government, acute market competition from imported agricultural produce and so on cumulatively deepen the agricultural crisis. After every harvesting season, a lot of marginal farmers in rural areas find it difficult to thrive further. This situation inter alia leads to large-scale migration of small and marginal farmers as well as agricultural labour to other regions - mostly urban areas and into the non-farm sector. This migration becomes a method of survival for most of these debt-stricken marginal farmers. In a study conducted on farmers of 14 villages of the Beed district of Maharashtra, it was found that 16 per cent of the population migrated during the dry season and the magnitude of seasonal migration ranged from 4 per cent to 90 per cent.

Quite often, such rural distress results in a massive exodus of people from villages to cities in search of better livelihood options. A report on the state of Indian farmers (2018) mentions that 76 per cent of the farmers are willing to do work other than farming and 61 per cent among them are willing to move to cities and work there because of the better provision in cities concerning health, education and employment prospects. In Sri Lanka, food insecurity and non-viability of agricultural activities in rural areas are found pushing people from rural areas to urban centres and even to international destinations⁵. Quite often such migrations are 'footloose' in nature as the migrants do not have any clarity about their destinations.

Persistent crop losses push the farmers and farmworkers into perennial indebtedness. Quite often, migration of a few or all members of the family becomes the only possible way of clearing the debts and supporting the family.

Cyclical food insecurities in agriculture (e.g. munga, meaning a famine-like situation, in Bangladesh) push many of the rural households to leave their native places in search of better employment and livelihood prospects. Farhana et al. (2012) provides a case study of Rajman Ali from Chakhori Village in Kurigram, Bangladesh, who was forced to migrate to the city following three consecutive stretches of Munga which pushed his entire family to dire poverty and food insecurity (see Box 2.4 below).

⁵As per estimates, about 243,000 workers departed for foreign employment (especially, to the Middle East) in 2016 alone.

Box 2.4: Monga in Bangladesh Forcing People to Move Out

Ramjan Ali had nine members in his family to support. He worked on his agricultural farm and was able to feed his family with his earning. However, things were not the same when monga hit his village. Monga is a cyclical food insecurity that occurs in the agricultural sector during the lean season. That particular year, monga took place thrice. His land could no longer yield enough. Soon his money and wealth started declining. He did not have enough food to feed his family. The family members were half fed. At one point, the members could not be provided food for three days at a stretch. Eventually, one of his daughters died of starvation. Finally, he, along with other villagers, moved to the city in search of work. Initially, he worked as a potter and later as a rickshaw puller. His two boys worked in the hotel. They occasionally went to their village and saw that things did not change much. Every year when monga would hit the village, it left everyone devastated. At last, he shifted to the city along with his family, leaving behind his ancestral village and land. Monga is considered to be one of the major factors that are forcing people to migrate from their villages to cities.

Source: Farhana et al. (2012).

Increasing incidents of suicides by small/marginal farmers and agricultural labourers in South Asian countries is a strong indicator of the deepening distress in rural areas. As per the National Crime Records Bureau, in India, more than 280,000 farmers committed suicide between 1995 and 2012 (Mishra, 2014). In Bhutan, an analysis of suicides according to jobs shows that farmers are the most vulnerable group. As per the data from the National Suicide Registry of the Ministry of Health, more than one-third (i.e. 34 out of 92) suicide victims in Bhutan in 2016 were farmers (Pem, 2017).

A report published in the Daily Star on 4 May 2018, entitled “A country of famished farmers”, narrates the growing incidents of small farmers’ suicides due to persistent crop losses and agricultural crisis in various parts of Bangladesh, namely Rajshahi, Jhenaidah and Habiganj. Quoting a 2016 study of the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, this report also points out that 55 per cent of the suicide victims were poorest of the poor among farmers or agricultural labourers with a monthly earning of less than Tk 4000 (Khan, 2018). In India also, increased incidents of farmer suicides have been a matter of concern in recent times.

Box 2.5: Farmer Suicide in Bangladesh

Shyamol had 10 decimal land which he used to grow rice. He inherited the land from his family, and had six members to feed. Along with the expenses of maintaining the family, he had debt for fertilisers, seeds, tractors etc. for which he paid monthly instalments. In the wake of the falling price of paddy, he shifted to growing radish and green chilies. He had a high yield of these vegetables on his land. However, when he took his production to the market, he saw that the market was already saturated with radish and green chilies. As a result, he had to sell all his produce at very low price, barely earning him Tk 2,000. He again shifted back to paddy cultivation. However, by that time he was diagnosed with a tumour in his stomach. Hence, he had to employ 8 workers on his land for paddy cultivation. Although the production was good, the profit was not sufficient to cover the debt instalments, medical expenditure and other household expenditure. As a result, he took his life. His case was not an isolated one. Several other farmers in the same village committed suicide due to crop failure, mounting debt, a lack of government support so on.

Source: Khan (2018).

2.3.3 Climate Change and Natural Disasters

In almost all countries in South Asia, natural disasters continue to be a major cause for internal displacement and forced migration of people. Natural disasters, ranging from flood, earthquake, drought, landslides, torrential rain and tsunami, have been frequently occurring in the region. Quite often, these natural disasters are caused or augmented by reckless human

interactions with nature, including unregulated land use, deforestation, unplanned growth, increasing population, rapid urbanisation and construction of dams. Thousands of people in South Asia leave their homes every year due to natural disasters and other natural calamities (such as riverbank erosion). In recent decades, the impact of such natural disasters is further worsened by visible changes in the climatic conditions. This phenomenon, commonly called as climate change,

in which climate is becoming increasingly warmer year after year, has now become a major driving force behind the migration of the distress-affected population. While this is happening all over the world, it is especially acute in the South Asian Region.

Climatic changes and natural disasters create many problems such as land degradation, floods, water shortage, food insecurity and the depletion of natural resources. These problems eventually push the affected population to migrate towards secure and safer destinations. As per an estimate of IOM, there will be around 200 million 'climatic migrants' in the world by 2050.

In many parts of South Asia, climate change is now increasingly manifested through unbearable temperature, highly variable and unpredictable patterns of rain and an overall increase in the pollution levels. These manifestations are found to be affecting the poorest of the poor in the region more, by adding to their already fragile and vulnerable livelihoods. In terms of climatic vulnerability, South Asia presents a very gloomy picture. As per estimates, by 2050, about half of the population will be in the moderate and severe climatic hotspots (Kaur & Kaur, 2018).

As per the World Risk Report (2011), countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan are in the high-vulnerability group, with respect to coping and adaptive capabilities. Bangladesh, according to the report, is considered to be 6th most risk-prone country in the world. However, as per the Global Risk Index, Bangladesh is considered the second most disaster-prone country. The degradation of coastal zones is a major issue in Bangladesh. One-fourth of the country's land is just 5 feet and two-third are just 15 feet above the sea level. Entire Bangladesh's landmass is slowly immersing into the water due to floods (Szczepanski et al., 2018; Sharayalaya, 2018). A 3-foot rise in sea level will submerge 20 per cent of the population of the country and this is expected to affect a population of more than 30 million. There are also forecasts that by 2100, the sea level will rise by 5-6 feet, leading to the displacement of about 50 million people (Glennon, 2017).

The geographical location of the Maldives renders it vulnerable to natural disasters. The country is made up of 1,190 islands, with its highest point at just 2.4 metres above the sea level. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that the Maldives is also one of the most vulnerable countries, when it comes to the impact of global warming. With 80 per cent of the country's landmass having an average elevation of less than 1 metre, a 50 cm rise in the sea level, as predicted to happen in the next 100 years, will make many of parts of the islands uninhabitable even before they get

flooded. This is because, the water of the Indian Ocean will mix with the fresh water source, making it unfit for human consumption and will also lead to depletion of natural resources and vegetation.

In Afghanistan, climate change is a major factor that determines the migration of the poor, especially those in rural areas. The farming sector in the country is highly volatile due to excessive dependence on rain-fed irrigation. Erratic availability of rains and snowfall leads to crop loss and eventual migration of the affected population, in search of more stable livelihood options. As around 80 per cent of the population is relying on natural resources for their livelihoods, frequently occurring natural hazards⁶ (including earthquakes, erratic snowfalls and even floods) are found to cause loss of lives, property and livelihoods for thousands of people every year, which in turn force the people to move out of their native regions (Parsa, 2019).

As per the Global Climate Risk Index, 2017, Pakistan is the seventh most climatically affected country in the world. In recent decades, a series of natural calamities hit the country, including an earthquake in 2005 and a massive flood in 2010. Karachi heatwaves of 2015 are yet another natural disaster of recent times. All these have added to the stock of climate induced migrants in the country (Ijas, 2017).

Box 2.6: Pakistan's Climate Migrants

Ahmed, aged 50, was rescued along with his family members from a flood site and shifted to another safe location. They lost 20 goats, which was their only asset and the only source of income. The few family possessions which they carried with them were used to purchase food. The children picked up disease, but they could not afford to rest. The children had to beg on the streets to get food. They had no idea about the relief camp or the place where the aid was distributed. Ahmed's son later had diarrhoea and fever for a week, but he had nothing left to sell to finance his medicines. The medicines which he procured from the state hospital did not help much and he had no resources to afford private clinics.

Source: Conway (2011).

In Nepal, following the earthquake in 2015, thousands of people got displaced within the country or moved to India. Besides this, the earthquake also led to a nation-wide political tension between the Madhesis (people of Indian origin in Nepal) and the Nepalīs.

⁶A 7.5 magnitude earthquake hit the North Eastern region of Afghanistan in 2015, claiming some 177 lives and injuring hundreds. Huge flooding and avalanches also hit the country in 2015, which claimed nearly 300 lives and affected over 8,000 families. Around 263,000 individuals were displaced in 2018 due to natural hazards, making up 42.91% of the total internally displaced individuals in that year (Parsa, 2019).

From 2008-2016, over 200 million people have been displaced around the world, where 1.3 million people in 2017 were internally displaced in India alone. It is estimated that by 2050, approximately 15 million people from Bangladesh will be on move due to natural calamities (Kabir et al., 2016). The infiltration of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh to India is also, to a large extent, climate-induced. Since Bangladesh is equally vulnerable and is prone to disaster, many people move to India as a part of their coping strategy to deal with climate change. Looking at infiltration of people beyond economic or political agenda, to include environmental factors may help us understand the issue of migration from a holistic perspective.

In Sri Lanka too, climate change is increasingly becoming a prominent factor for push migration. In 2015, the cyclone Roanu created havoc in Sri Lanka. In 2016, there were floods and landslides in some parts of the country, displacing thousands of people. Afterwards, there was an 11-month long drought that affected around 200,000 people.

Box 2.7: Climate-induced Displacement in Nepal

- In Nepal, erratic rain and snowfalls have been a major issue in the Upper Mustang, a trans-Himalayan region. Due to acute water shortages, 23 villages in the region had to be relocated to Thangchung in 2009. More recently, in 2016, Samjong village in Upper Mustang had to be relocated to Namashung village in the same region due to prolonged spells of drought and water scarcity which affected the livelihoods of the local population.
- As per the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) report (2010), 29 out of 75 districts in the country are highly vulnerable to natural calamities and climate change.

Source: Reliefweb (2017).

The geographical location of the Indian territory has rendered several states (Assam, Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal, to cite a few) vulnerable and prone to natural disasters, and their frequency has also increased in the recent years owing to environmental imbalances created due to global warming and unplanned developments. In 2013, when cyclone Phailin hit the Orissa coastal area in India, there was a massive migration of fishing communities. Similar was the scenario in Uttarakhand, which witnessed a deluge in recent past. The unusual floods and deluge in Kerala in 2018 and 2019 are among the recent cases in this regard. Sinha (2003) mentions that around 57 per cent

of the Indian landmass is vulnerable to earthquake, 28 per cent to drought, 12 per cent to flood and 8 per cent to cyclone. The assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) also indicates the possibilities of migration of people, both within the country as well as outside the country, due to climatic factors. Chakraborty and Joshi (2014) have further mapped the sensitivity of different regions in India, considering the population and ecological factors. As per the sensitivity index, the regions that are more sensitive due to high population density and fragile environment are some of the districts Jharkhand, of Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. Agriculture is the primary occupation in these states, and they are predominantly poor regions of the country. Therefore, it can be said that any natural and climatic disaster affects the poorer section of the population relatively more than the well-off sections.

According to available estimates, in 2014, Odisha floods displaced around 1.07 million, Jammu and Kashmir flood displaced 812,000, cyclone Hudhud displaced 639,300 and Assam and Meghalaya floods displaced 367,000 people from their respective places (IDMC & NRC, 2015). Overall, around the world, 20 million people were displaced due to different disaster situations. In fact, the data shows that China, India and the Philippines are the three countries that had the maximum number of disaster-induced displacements in absolute terms from 2008 to 2014. As per Asian Development Bank (ADB), roughly 37 million people from India will be at risk due to raising of sea level, by 2050. A Greenpeace study estimates that by 2100, about 120 million people will be affected in India and Bangladesh (Lal, 2019).

Box 2.8: Climate Refugees of Sundarbans Delta

Sundarbans Delta has been one of the most vulnerable sites, which has generated lots of climate refugees in India. Sumit Pramanik, a resident of the island, studies in West Bengal, which is 250 km away from his hometown. Every time he leaves for his hostel, he hopes that his house remains in the same place when he comes back next time. Unfortunately, every time he returns, his house is shifted a few meters back. In May 2016 semester break, when he went back to his home, there were mounting fears of a cyclone. All the bamboo fences and huts made of mud were destroyed in the high tide. Once there is a flood, the ferry would come to the island with supplies. Sometimes the turbulence is so high that the ferry is unable to reach the banks. People are also ferried in boats to the nearby settlements.

Source: Azim (2016).

2.3.4. Development Induced Displacement and Migration

In South Asia, thousands of people are forced to leave their places of origin every year due to loss of land and livelihoods, thanks to development projects such as dams, irrigation, roads, highways, canals, mines, power plants and industrial development activities. A sizeable number of the population are also get shifted due to the construction of new cities, towns and urban centres. As metro cities and large towns are getting expanded into the suburbs, many of the erstwhile marginal and small farmers and agricultural labours get eventually pushed out of their villages and join the pool of 'transit labour' and 'footloose labour', who increasingly constitute major segments of migrant-labour in urban spaces.

The case studies of dams like Tarbela, Mangla and Kalabagh in Pakistan and Hirakud and Sardar Sarovar Project in India highlight concerns for the livelihood of the displaced people. In Pakistan, the construction of development projects like the Mangla Dam uprooted over 50,000 people. Recently, a proposal to increase the efficiency of the dam is estimated to affect 7,000 households, i.e. 50 per cent population of the Mirzapur city, where the dam has been constructed. Another

case is that of Tarbela Dam which had affected 120 villages and dislocated 96,000 people. The Chasma Right Bank Canal is another case where thousands of people rendered homeless. As per certain estimates, various development projects in India alone have displaced around 50 million people, where around 16.4 million are displaced due to construction of dams, 2.55 million due to mining, 1.25 million due to industrial development projects and 0.6 million for wildlife-sanctuaries and national-parks. The Hirakud dam displaced 180,000 (100,000, as per official estimate) and Farakka super thermal power plant displaced 63,325 (none displaced as per official estimate). The Bergi dam near Jabalpur submerged three times more land than it was estimated, and when the reservoirs were filled, 162 villages were submerged. With 3,300 big dams being constructed in the last 50 years, the list of displaced people is never ending. These developmental projects have displaced approximately 40 per cent of the tribal population and 20 per cent of the Dalit population. To make matters even worse, people had to withstand not only one but multiple displacements. In Nepal too, several hydropower, dam and road construction projects have uprooted thousands of people from their homeland (see Box 2.9 below).

Box 2.9: Development Projects in Sri Lanka Leading to Displacement of People

Irrigation projects in Sri Lanka have displaced thousands of people of the country. The Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project in the 1970s displaced approximately 12,000 families. Similarly, in order to promote tourism, 1,200 hectares of land was leased out, displacing around 5,000 fishermen. More than 350 families of farmers have been evicted from the Raigamwela and Shastrawela villages to build tourist hotels. Meanwhile, the Kelani Valley railway line expansion project has put lots of families of an informal settlement in Colombo known as 'Seevali Pura' at risk of being displaced.

Source: Godamunne (2014) & Srilankabrief (2012).

Box 2.10: Hydroelectric Project and Displacement of People in Nepal

With the construction of Nepal's first reservoir dam, the Kulekhani I, 3,000 people were displaced. They were promised with good compensation of cash rather than land. The sudden influx of cash among the residents of the region led to a surge in the price of land. The increasing cost of land meant that the people faced difficulty in procuring a piece of land from the given compensation amount. Moreover, the compensations were paid only to those who were directly affected. However, there were a large group of people who were affected indirectly by the river body. These were the downstream people who were dependent on the river as source of water. For them, the river was gone. They were not compensated for their loss. Moreover, for those who were compensated with cash, the time lag between receiving the compensation amount and getting the agricultural produce was quite long. As a result, many families were struck by poverty.

Source: Fast (2015).

In Pakistan, the ongoing project of Lahore Orange Line Metro Train alone has led to the displacement of 10,000 families along the route (Hashmat, 2017). In Sri Lanka, many development projects, including the Southern Transport Development Project (STDP), Colombo Katunayake Expressway (CKE) and Lunawe Environmental Improvement and Community Development Project (LEICDP), led to massive displacement of the population. Irrigation development schemes such as the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project (AMDP) are also reported to have affected 12,000 families, as their agricultural lands were submerged by the rising water levels (Godammune, 2014).

There are also cases where the development process pushes the population beyond the national boundaries. A classic example is the Chakmas from Chittagong Hills, who are now in Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

2.3.5 Socio-Political Conflicts

As per the ranking of Global Peace Index, 2018, South Asia is the second least peaceful region in the world, accounting for about one fifth of all conflicts and conflict-related deaths in 2016. Civil wars and tensions between different religions and communities, leading to persecution of minorities by dominant groups have found fuelling migration of the affected people. The reasons behind the socio-political conflicts in the region include the tensions due to differences in identity, religion, ethnicity/social group, language and so on. To escape such conflicts, a large number of people are found moving towards other destinations.

Many of the refugees and asylum seekers in South Asia are victims of civil wars and/or socio-political conflicts. These include Sri Lankan refugees who migrated to India during the Sri Lankan civil war between LTTE and the Sri Lankan forces⁷, and the Rohingyas Refugees who fled the violence in the Rakhine province of Myanmar. In the case of Rohingya refugees, who are pushed out of Myanmar, religion is the prime reason for the expulsion and ethnic persecution.

Afghanistan witnessed a series of political turmoil and social tensions in the past four decades. The Soviet invasion in 1979, takeover of Mujahedeen in 1992, the emergence of Taliban in 1994 and the military intervention of the US in 2001 were all found leading to both external and internal displacement of the Afghan population. During the Taliban regime, religious minorities had to flee across national borders to escape from ethnic massacres.

Box 2.11: Immigration and the Fear of Deportation

Taibeh's family fled from Afghanistan to Iran during the Soviet invasion. Taibeh was born in Iran. However, because of the discrimination faced by the family in Iran, they moved to Norway. Taibeh grew up in Norway and she, along with her siblings, received their education there. After a few years, Taibeh's family received a letter from the Norwegian authority that they would be deported back to Afghanistan. It came as a shock to the entire family as Afghanistan was still not safe to live and Taibeh had never been to Afghanistan. Taibeh's friends launched a campaign #AbbasiStays to demonstrate their support to her and protest against the government decision. Later, when Taibeh and her family reached Afghanistan, the Afghan authorities refused to admit them.

Source: Amnesty International (2019).

As in the case of Afghanistan, Pakistan was also affected by the Taliban regime, leading to the internal displacement of thousands of people from affected areas. As per the estimates of the Institute for Economics and Peace, Pakistan is the fourth largest terrorism affected country. Ongoing tensions between different sects of Muslims and between various political parties in both in Pakistan and Afghanistan often prompt some of the affected people to migrate towards safer places outside and within the country.

The political turmoil on account of civil war and uprising of militancy groups in the region led to a situation where migration across national borders becomes the only option for a major chunk of the population. Tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil population in Sri Lanka, Maoist conflicts in Nepal and the social tensions in Baluchistan and Sindh are certain cases of this sort of forced migration. Yet another case is the forcible out-migration of Lhotshampa population in Bhutan in the early 1990s, following the implementation of the 1985 Citizenship Act and the "One-Nation, One-People" policy by the Bhutan government (Dhakal, 2019)

North-east India also provides a good example of internal migration propelled by ethnic tensions. There is a growing body of literature on the north-east migrants in India, which suggests that younger people had to migrate from states like Manipur and Nagaland because of socio-political tensions, to far-off urban centres within India (e.g. Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore). Many of these migrants are youths – who initially migrate for their education and eventually enter the labour markets of their destinations for better employment prospects.

⁷ There were also a large number of IDPs (internally displaced persons). As per estimates, decades of ethnic conflict armed civil war in Sri Lanka between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sinhalese government displaced around 800,000 people from their native places (Kumar, 2010).

In South Asian countries, often, the people of the same ethnic groups or communities are found spreading across provincial and national borders. This borderless spread complicates the tensions further. The continuing conflicts between the Nagas in Manipur of North India is an example in this regard. Socio-political tensions also lead to reverse migration in certain cases. Many migrants from other states had to leave Maharashtra when there was a strong move against migrants from other states (Sons of the Soil Movement). Similarly, there was a massive exodus of North-Eastern persons in Bangalore in 2014, following rumours.

Unaccounted migration or refugee movements across national/provincial borders also lead to tensions between the migrants/displaced and the locals. Social tensions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan following the large-scale influx of Afghan refugees is an example. Other cases include: the conflicts between illegal Bangladeshi migrants and the local population in states like Assam and West Bengal in India, the persecution experienced by the Lhotshampa community in Bhutan, and the tensions between the Madhesi (an ethnic group of Indian origin) and the Nepali population following the earthquake in Nepal in 2015.

2.3.6 Other Factors

- **Demographic Factors:** The demographic profiles of South Asian countries are also found shaping the international migration from the region. India is currently in a phase characterised by a 'demographic dividend', where a larger share of the population falls in the working age group. This aspect helped many of the South Asians to find employment in countries that are going through the phase of 'ageing' and in countries such as Germany, America and Australia with 'scarcity of labour' in some occupational categories. Thus, in the case of large-scale emigration of unskilled workers (from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh), nurses, domestic workers and caregivers (from countries such as India and Sri Lanka) to the GCC countries, the demographical profiles of both the source-countries and host-countries have crucial prominence.
- **Improved Connectivity and Communication Channels:** Improved connectivity between source and destination regions is a factor behind the high rates of migration, especially when it involves long-distance movement of people. In the case of internal migration, improvement in rural-urban connectivity (through improved transport facilities, roads, infrastructure, express ways and connecting trains) has resulted in the emergence of new migration streams. In the older day, the internal migrants in South Asian countries were mostly short-distance migrants (intra- and inter-

district migration). However, in recent times, there is considerable growth in long-distance internal migration. In the case of international migration also, improved connectivity and communication channels facilitated the continuous flow of migrants within South Asia and beyond. For instance, there are frequent international flights from all South Asian countries other parts of the world, thereby improving the connectivity of these countries and the mobility of the people.

- **Social Networking:** Social networking plays a crucial role in the process of migration. One of the important reasons for chain migration of a certain group of people from the same geographical area, or a group having a certain common social identity is the endowment of social capital which is a rich source of information that helps facilitate migration right from the point of origin to destination. Those people assist the migrants in getting settled subsequently in the destination regions. Social ties also strengthen through the development of effective channels of communication. Hence, improvement in telecommunication and information channel has a crucial role in facilitating migration. Not only have these channels helped in facilitating migration but also connecting the migrants and their families, staying in far-off places.⁸

2.4 Core Determinants: Poverty and Inequality

While the above reasons are central in necessitating migration, it can be argued that poverty and inequality are the core determinants that eventually shape the migration of poor. Irrespective of the reason (be it is rural distress, development-induced, climate-induced or any other), those who are resource-poor are the ones who are migrating due to compulsions – for better employment and livelihood options. The richest segments in the source regions often cope up with adverse circumstances, as they have some fall-back options and resources to rely on during adverse circumstances. On the contrary, in certain other circumstances, it is those who are endowed with resources, actually move. For example, during the Taliban conflict in Afghanistan, the upper-class people started moving to European countries while those who were relatively poor moved to another province. The poorest of the poor were left behind to face the miseries due to the changing political scenario.

Thus, while understanding the root causes, one can see that inequality at different levels matters considerably, when it comes to migration of the poor. Those who are

⁸Explaining the case of Afghanistan, Parsa (2019) states that – "Cultural, tribal and family links across the borders overtime have also developed the larger networks and corridors of movement between Afghanistan and other countries, particularly Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and recently Europe. Families with one or two members in another country, over time, figuring out the various mechanisms, build wider networks for the movements of the rest of the family members and even closer relatives expanding the network".

less possessed and without any support systems are the first to move. When these resource-poor reach their destinations, their poverty force them to participate in inferior quality jobs, where terms are strict and working conditions appalling. Thus, the deplorable plight of migrants in the destinations is also a case of a vicious circle of poverty and inequality – where inequality perpetuates poverty and vice versa.

Often, the migration patterns have connections with the level of poverty. There is evidence that poorest of the poor prefer short-distance migration. Accordingly, short distance internal migrations can be seen as a survival strategy of the poorest. In the case of international migration also, the resource-less often opt to move to nearby countries. For instance, Bangladeshi migrants prefer India as a destination, as it is easier and cheaper to migrate to – rather than going to a far-off country with better wages/salaries of the same is true for Nepali migrants to India and Afghan migrants to Pakistan.

2.5 Migration Dilemmas: Issues Faced by Migrants

The issues related to migration and the migrants can be broadly divided into three categories, according to the phases involved in the migration process. These are discussed below.

(a) Pre-migration Issues (Issues in Source Regions and During Transit): There are many issues concerning the preparatory and transitory phases of migration. The most important pre-migration issues are related to the contexts that facilitate migration. The reasons for push factors (e.g. agrarian distress, unemployment, socio-political tensions, resource depletion and so on) are all very crucial for the migrants in deciding their decision to migrate. The working or non-working of social safety nets such as PDS and employment guarantee schemes are also linked to pre-migration issues.

The absence of accurate information about the destination regions and the availability of employment opportunities there, the absence of reliable institutional mechanisms (such as, employment exchanges or information/guidance bureaus) and institutional credit facilities are some of the other issues faced by the migrants at this stage.

Yet another issue is the malicious practices of recruitment agents and middlemen. There are several instances of migrants being charged exorbitantly and illegally by the agents (in the name of commission or brokerage). As per an ILO Report of 2016, many emigrants from Pakistan are found paying exorbitant charges (up to 20 times of the normal charges) to fetch work permits in Saudi Arabia (ILO, 2016).

According to a World Bank report (2017), there are considerable transaction costs involved in the recruitment. The low-skilled workers often pay huge sums, more than the expected income of entire year, as recruitment charges to intermediaries (Bashyal, 2019). In the case of Nepal, despite the “free-visa-and-free-ticket” provision of the Nepal government, the recruitment agents are found charging exorbitant charges from resource-poor migrants (mostly from rural areas).

Many migrants also risk their lives by resorting to illegal transit options, with the help of intermediaries. Arambepola (2019) explains the case of war-displaced migrants from Sri Lanka, who attempted to reach Australia by boat. These migrants are found paying large sums of money to intermediaries, who operated as human-smuggling rings to exploit the desperate war-affected communities. The story of the boatmen from Bangladesh (see Box 2.12 below) is yet another example of illicit transit of migrants.

Box 2.12: Vulnerability of Migrants: The Story of Boatmen from Bangladesh

According to Deutsche Welle (DW), the international broadcaster of Germany, around 2,000 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants were rescued in Thailand who were illegally transported by human smugglers in May 2015. Apart from these migrants, the Chief of Mission of IOM (International Organisation of Migration) explained in an interview that there were about 8,000 more stranded boatmen in the sea, with dwindling supplies. The smugglers were refusing to land them, fearing stringent action on them by the Government of Thailand, following the discovery of many mass graves near the border region close to Malaysia. All these boatmen were believed to have taken the risky sea route, in search of a safer migration destination and to escape the miseries in their own places.

Source: DW (2015).

In the absence of formally approved official networks for migration, many of the migrants also eventually get trafficked to destination regions with the help of illegal agents and intermediaries. Bashyal (2019) discusses the case of trafficking of Nepali women for domestic work in Saudi Arabia. It is explained that as per the estimates of the National Human Right Organisation, the human smugglers earn around Rs 400,000 by supplying a domestic worker. The intermediaries are also found charging exorbitant sums from the migrants for facilitating their transit based on false documents. While a good chunk of these migrants is transited

through Kathmandu, some are also taken via India to their destinations in Gulf countries. Often, these trafficked workers are forced to sign two separate labour contracts - one in Nepal and another in the destination country. Many a times, they are also subjected to high levels of exploitation in the destination countries, which include denial of wages, forced work under inhuman working conditions, sexual harassments and so on.

(b) Post-migration Issues (Issues at Destination)

Majority of the poor migrants face many issues at their destinations. Many of them end up in informal sector jobs with pathetic working and living conditions. The absence of adequate living facilities is one of the most serious problems. Along with this, migrants are often forced to accept sub-human working conditions (and are often away from the reach of protective labour legislation and labour welfare schemes). In many cases, migrants do not receive reasonable payments due to language and cultural barriers and a lack of adequate educational qualifications. Irregular payment of wages, withholding of wages, paid wages less than what was promised, salary deductions, denial of medical insurance and long working hours etc. are some of the frequent problems they face. Most of the South Asian migrants are working without any labour rights in the GCC countries. In the Gulf countries, one can see migrants from South Asia working as permanently temporary workers for many years, without basic labour and citizenship rights.

Box 2.13: Plight of Pakistani Migrants in Saudi Arabia

There are 1.6 million Pakistanis currently in Saudi Arabia, which makes them the second-largest migrant community in the country. Though religious affinity is a factor that makes GCC an attractive destination for international migration from Pakistan, there are many disadvantages faced by these migrants in the Gulf countries. Unlike western countries (the United States or Europe), the Gulf countries do not give citizenships to the migrants, even if they work there for many years. This relegates the status of migrants to that of second-class citizens. Often, these migrants are subject to systematic prejudices and discriminations in the host society and are even denied basic rights like unionising in the workplace or the right to dissent.

Imprisonment rates are high among Pakistani nationals, with 3,039 Pakistani prisoners being currently held in Saudi Arabia (Malik, 2019). According to a report of the Human Rights Watch (2018), 17 Pakistanis were executed in 2017, the highest number for any foreign country.

Sources: Jan (2019); HRW (2018).

An oft-cited issue in the case of international migration is the difference between promised and actual wages and working conditions. Frequently, they find themselves trapped into sub-human working and living conditions in far-off lands. For instance, Horner (2017) reports stories of migrant workers from Pakistan and Bangladesh, who are trapped in farm work in Greece.

Migrants are also vulnerable to occupational accidents, and they are also largely deprived of social security benefits (like medical coverage). Thus, many of them die at their workplaces due to a lack of safety measures, timely treatment and so on. The following case of Nepali migrants will clarify this aspect.

Box 2.14: A deadly Decade for Migrant Workers from Nepal

The Kathmandu Post (5 November 2018) reports that, during the past 10 years, Nepal has received Rs 4.48 trillion (around USD 38.7 billion) in remittances from migrant workers abroad. In the same period, 6,708 Nepalis who had gone abroad in search for better life returned home in coffins, making the lucrative labour migration one of the deadliest and costliest affairs for Nepal.

Source: Bashyal (2019).

As per media reports, the forthcoming football World Cup's construction sites in Qatar provides almost slave like working conditions for migrant workers. Between 4th June and 8th August 2013, it is reported that at least 44 workers died in these construction sites (Pattison, 2013). But most of these deaths were eventually reported as natural deaths (Bashyal, 2019).

Declining job prospects is a burning problem for the Indian migrants in the GCC countries. As mentioned earlier, the continuous influx of Indian migrants has changed the demography of the receiving countries. As of now, most of the GCC countries now have a major proportion of Indians as residents. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) alone is estimated to have more than 3.5 million Indians in 2015. However, due to this change in the demography of the Gulf region, the employment prospects of Indians are steadily declining. Job opportunities are also contracting thanks to initiatives such as Emiratisation, Saudisation and Omanisation and recent stricter immigration policies.

Due to the hostile attitude of local societies and discriminatory treatment (in terms of charging higher rents, exclusion from activities related to local-community and so on), migrants often prefer to stay within own groups. Accordingly, there are migrants-only localities. Even though these migrant

neighbourhoods provide avenues for socialisation and mutual help for migrants, the flipside is that formation of such settlements also leads to a situation of ghettoisation. Many studies report that migrant ghettos are mostly characterised by sub-human living conditions (in terms of availability of water, electricity and other basic facilities). Further, such insulated communities often fall prey to targeted attacks from anti-social groups, whenever there is a tension between local communities and migrants.

Migrants are often left out of the democratic institutions. Obtaining work permits, visas, passports, voter ids, bank accounts, ration cards etc. are major issues for migrants. Many a times, establishing their identity itself is a major challenge. In the Indian context, the case of undocumented migrants from Bangladesh in North-eastern state of Assam and the issues related to the introduction of National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) are recent episodes related to legality and national identity of migrants.

Migrants are also often treated as the main culprits and possible suspects for all crimes and social tensions that happen in the destination regions. They are often

labelled as criminals and anti-socials who are engaged in illicit activities such as drug peddling, smuggling, trafficking and other immoral activities. Given that drug trafficking is a very serious offence in the GCC countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia), the migrants who are booked for such crimes had to undergo severe tortures, and at times are sentenced to capital punishment. A detailed account of the issues faced by detainees from Pakistan (who are booked for drug smuggling) is given in HRW (2018).

Social exclusion and discrimination of migrants can happen in the case of internal migration, too. Remesh (2019) explains the hardships faced by migrants from North-eastern states of India in places (like Delhi) in the country. Due to a multitude of differences between the migrant and host societies, the migrants are found subjected to many discriminatory practices in their destinations, which make them feel as “strangers in their own land”. They end up paying higher rents and are denied of basic entitlements (like acquiring a voter id card or a licence), besides being forced to live in migrant ghettos to avoid insults, discriminations and exploitation from the local population.

Box 2.15: “Vicious circle of poverty” and Migrants in Bangalore Slums

Between 70 and 100 per cent of slum dwellers in Bangalore belong to Scheduled Castes (socially backward communities), whereas they account for only 11.4 per cent of Bangalore’s total urban population. Most of these migrants are mainly landless or own very small plots in their villages.

Their living conditions are very poor in urban slums also. There are no basic facilities - no electricity connection; water has to be purchased from private vendors; no sanitation facilities or arrangements for garbage removal; no provision of public health facilities neither by the government nor by NGOs and are located far-away from public-transport facilities. Besides, these slum dwellers also lack basic citizenship rights as they do not possess identity papers or voter ID cards, for which they do not attract any political patronage or official support.

Thus, the poorest in rural areas continues to be the poorest during their post-migration phase in urban centres.

Source: Krishna et al. (2014).

Portability of social security benefits is a major issue. Many of the migrants fail to access some of their basic entitlements, as the documents proving their eligibility are not with them. For instance, most of the internal migrants (who are temporarily moved to an urban centre) are not in a position to access their entitled social security benefits in their destination-regions.

Most of these post-migration (destination-related) issues are common in both internal and international migrants. In both the cases, the poor migrants end up in informal sector work (with precarious work conditions), in migrant-ghettos or slums with squalid living conditions and are subjected to different layers of social and political exclusion – including exclusion from local and democratic institutions.

(c) Issues of Return Migration

There are many issues related to return-migration. Most of the migrants, especially the long-term migrants, find it very difficult to come back and settle in their native regions. The lack of financial help during the time of return, provision of institutional credit, assurance of basic social security benefits and/or availability of some basic employment back home are the major issues that the return-migrants often encounter.

The issues faced by Indian migrants in GCC need a special mention here. There are many migrants from India, who are in jails in the Gulf countries waiting for their release and safe return. Similarly, many Indians in GCC are working illegally (without proper documents)

and are looking forward to a safe return. Stories of slave-like-labour in trapped situations (as explained in a well-known Malayalam novel *Aadujeevitham* – Goat Life) are also not very rare.

Releasing these Indian emigrants (by extending legal, financial and diplomatic support) is a major requirement regarding return-migration. Provision of support in terms of financing the cost of the return journey of those who are helpless and with respect to arranging the transportation of dead bodies of migrants who died abroad is also an important concern.

Integration of return migrants back to their native economies is also a major challenge, as the labour absorption capacities of local economies are strikingly low.

Box 2.16: Dilemma of the Return Migrants: The Case of IDPs in Sri Lanka

Arambepola (2019) discusses the issues concerning the return migrants of Sri Lanka, who were pushed out from their natives due to the protracted civil war in the country. During the three-decade-long civil war in Sri Lanka, about 450,000 people were internally displaced. For these war-induced migrants, returning home after the war has been a challenging issue. Apart from the procedures to be followed for the release of land held under military control, there were many other issues such as the absence of essential infrastructure and facilities. Citing the findings of a study of the Centre for Poverty Analysis (2015), the author explains that finding a foothold in their previous homes have been a struggle for the returnees, in the absence of a proper rehabilitation plan. Many of the return migrants fell into high level of indebtedness while struggling to rebuild their lives. Additionally, finding a gainful employment and stable income was also a major challenge for those who returned.

Source: Arambepola (2019).

Return migration is a major problem in Afghanistan. Between 2001 and April 2018, around 7 million Afghan migrants and refugees returned home, mostly from Pakistan and Iran (Parsa, 2019). Providing basic facilities to these people and rehabilitating them with gainful employment opportunities will remain a major challenge for Afghanistan in the coming years.

2.6 Concluding Remarks

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the migration scenarios of South Asian countries are determined by multiple factors. These factors are often inter-connected, and it is quite difficult to establish the significance and impact of each of the single drivers of migration. It is also evident from the discussion that poverty and inequality are central to the migration matters in the South Asian region. These central determinants are found affecting the situations of the migrants, in each of the phases of migration – pre-migration, post-migration and return migration.

Though it is not explicitly explained in the chapter, the discussions also point towards the importance of the state in migration matters. The state has multiple roles – as the regulator of migration, as protector of migrants and as welfare-provider to the migrants, who normally lack other fall-back options. It can facilitate informed migration by providing adequate data and directions to prospective migrants and by providing less expensive and safer transit options. The state can also improve the working and living conditions of migrants – both within the national territories (by enacting laws and introducing welfare measures) and outside the national borders (through bilateral treaties and diplomatic relations). It can also reach to migrants and refugees through ratification of international conventions and national legislations. State policies regarding migrants and refugees are crucial in terms of safeguarding their interests. Thus, it is important to analyse the role of the state in shaping the migration scenarios and the temporal changes in the state's approaches towards migration in the South Asian context. This aspect will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, while focusing on the implications of 'neoliberal' state on the migration scenario of South Asia.

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Women's Migration in South Asia

Women's Migration in South Asia

Babu P Remesh

3.1. Introduction

Migration has never been a gender-neutral phenomenon. The impact and implications of migration on men and women have always been different. Usually, migration more severely impacts women as compared to men—irrespective of whether it is climate-induced, development-pushed, distress-driven, politically-induced or socially-forced. In this backdrop, the chapter focuses on some of the specific issues concerning women's migration in South Asia. Attention is given to capture the connections between women's migration and the approach of the state in terms of policies, regulatory framework and so on.

The chapter also covers various linkages between marriage-migration and labour market (especially, the eventual entry of married women from socio-economically weaker sections into the labour markets of their post-marital destinations), increasing feminisation of women in select sectors (e.g. readymade garments, domestic services and care work) and some of the unique issues concerning women's work and migration.

An attempt is also made to capture specific vulnerabilities of women, discriminations based on gender divisions, including unequal treatment in labour markets (lower wages, longer hours of work), sexual harassment at workplace, trafficking and gender-based biases in matters related to migration and so on.

3.2. Internal Migration of Women in South Asia: A Snapshot

In the South Asian countries, women have always been active in migration – whether it is internal, intra-regional or international migration. Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that women's participation rates and patterns vary across countries and between internal and international migration streams. In all the countries in South Asia, women's shares in internal migration have been relatively high. For instance, in India, as per Census 2011, the proportions of women's migration are found considerably higher to those of men. Women form a major percentage of internal migration in all four categories, i.e. rural to rural, rural to urban, urban to rural and urban to urban (Remesh, 2019).

Migration for seeking (better) employment is one of the major reasons for women's migration in the

South Asian context. This is perhaps the second most important reason, after marriage/familial reasons. Poverty and lack of employment opportunities often push rural population (irrespective of gender) to migrate to urban areas within their own country - for seeking employment and better working and living conditions. Accordingly, most of the bigger cities in the South Asian region – Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka, Chittagong, Karachi, Kabul, Herat, Kathmandu, Thimphu, Male, Colombo and many more – have become the receiving pockets for thousands of migrant workers, a good chunk of which is women.

In recent years, large-scale migration of women affected by rural distress and agrarian crisis to other rural and urban areas (as a coping strategy) has been reported widely. Many of these women work in sectors such as construction, brick kilns and factories – where the working conditions are extremely exploitative. While a good proportion of these women are found moving along with families and in groups, there are also cases of women's only migration to urban centres – either as single women migrant or in groups. Often, this sort of migration happens through the help of middle-men/recruitment-agencies/traffickers.

While many of the unskilled women get absorbed in jobs within the urban informal sector, similar to their male counterparts, one can also see some particular patterns of women migrants' employment in the receiving pockets. Often, these women are found concentrating on certain occupations and sectors. Domestic work is a major sector that absorbs internal women migrants in almost all of the South Asian countries. For instance, in India, there are millions of tribal women (from states like Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Assam, etc.) who work in far-off urban areas as domestic helps.

Yet another occupation that engages rural women migrants in the urban centres is the factory work. The garment factories in Dhaka, Colombo and Chittagong are very frequently cited examples for 'feminised' segments within urban labour markets of South Asia. In India, too, jobs in the textiles and garment sector are predominantly occupied by women. Apart from the garment sector, there are many other factories—manufacturing units, food processing units and so on—engaging women migrants in considerable numbers.

While several issues are important to be discussed and studied related to internal migration of South

Asian women, in the initial part of this chapter, we will have a closer look at issues related to the international migration of women in South Asia⁹.

3.3. International Migration of Women: Some Salient Features

Similar to the pattern of overall migration, for the countries of South Asia, the GCC countries and West Asia are the prominent destinations for women's migration. This pattern of Gulf-centric migration of women has become more visible since the turn of the present century. Considerable numbers of women from countries like India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are found working in the GCC countries and their numbers are expected to increase in the future.

In most of the South Asian countries, international labour migration is largely a male-dominated phenomenon. As per the "International Migration Report, 2017" of UN-DESA, though women constitute around 48 per cent of total migrants globally, this proportion is considerably low for Asian countries (UN-DESA, 2018). In Pakistan, women constitute only 1 per cent of the total migrants (Jan, 2019). The trend is the same in Bhutan also. If we exclude the refugee population, the share of women among international migration is below 20 per cent (Dhakal, 2019). In Afghanistan, historically, the stereotypical image of migration has been the male, and female migrants are seen as tied-up-movers, not independent agents of migration (Parsa, 2019). In Nepal, though the stock of women migrants has been increasing in recent years, still the migration is a male-dominated activity (Bashyal, 2019). As per the 2011 Census of Nepal, there are only 12 Nepali females for every 100 males abroad (Bashyal, 2019). In Bangladesh, 88 per cent of registered migrant workers departing for foreign employment in 2017 were males. Additionally, in the case of Sri Lanka, this figure was 66 per cent (ILO-SL, 2018). Only in Sri Lanka, at least for some time (i.e. during 2007-08), the number of women migrants had gone up more than the number of male migrants. But in recent years, this trend got reversed. Thus, there is no reason to believe that there is a trend of 'visible feminisation' of migration in South Asia. However, there are reasons to believe that 'some sort of feminisation' is happening in recent times. Firstly, over time, more women are migrating for employment rather than joining male family members as dependents. Secondly, over time, some of the occupations in the destination countries are increasingly becoming 'feminised'. Clear-cut demarcation on gender lines is visible if one maps the occupations where migrant labour from South Asian countries are working in their destination-countries. While women migrants from South Asian

countries are mostly engaged in the care economy (including domestic services, cleaning, caregiving, nursing and so on) and in low paid factory works (e.g. garment factory work), their male counterparts are mostly working in 'masculine jobs' such as construction works¹⁰, driving, security work and many other service sector occupations.

Within the region also, the Maldives, which is a net-immigrating country that hosts thousands of migrants from other countries of South Asia, shows a similar pattern of the gendered division of occupations. A field survey report published by the International Organisation for Migration in 2014 reports that the majority of female immigrants in the Maldives are engaged in domestic work, whereas the male migrants are predominantly occupied in construction and other service sector activities (Zahir, 2019).

Thus, it is evident that patriarchal norms regarding the suitability of certain types of work for women are emerging as the main factor that shapes the migration patterns and the feminisation of migrant occupations. We will get more solid reasoning about the influence of patriarchal norms in the next session which focuses on the patriarchal restrictions imposed by the South Asian governments on women's migration.

3.4. Understanding the Role of 'Patriarchal State' in Women's Migration

By now, it is widely understood and acknowledged that the lower share of women in migration (as well as in overall labour force participation) in the South Asian societies is largely due to the overall dominance of patriarchal norms. Traditionally, in all the South Asian countries, men are considered as the 'bread-winner' of the family and women as the 'homemakers'. Due to the prevalence of this 'male-breadwinner norm', women's mobility outside the home and into public spaces are traditionally restricted. Accordingly, many of these societies are with lower participation rates of women in the labour market and lower share of women in the total stock of migrants.

In Pakistan, rigid social system and patriarchal values put lots of restrictions on women's labour force participation and migration (Jan, 2019), and as per the ranking of Global Gender Gap Index, Pakistan was second-to-last for five years in a row (2012-17) in terms of labour force participation rates (LPR) of women. As per ILO data, the LFPR of women in Pakistan is only about 24.8 per cent, which is a mere one-third of that of men (Ahmed, 2018).

Parsa (2019) discusses the patriarchal restrictions on women's migration in Afghanistan. The author explains

⁹In a subsequent section of this chapter, we will revisit the internal migration aspects with a special focus on the connection between marriage and family-related migration.

¹⁰An important aspect to be noticed here is that while women are visibly present among internal migrants, who are working in the construction sector, when it comes to international migration, their proportion is very insignificant.

the hardships and difficulties that women faced during the civil war, and, particularly, under the Taliban regime. During this period, women's migration was allowed only along with a guardian. Such patriarchal controls on women's movement are now breaking up with the increase in education among women in Afghanistan. It is also viewed that often such restrictions were also found forcing some of the women to migrate out of the country, often in difficult and unsafe circumstances (Parsa, 2019).

The migration policies followed by various South Asian countries also reflect the patriarchal restrictions and traditional norms that discourage or regulate women's migration. Most of the South Asian countries do have some restrictions or directions that regulate free movement of women across country borders.

Keeping age-caps for women's migration is a prominent restriction in some of the countries. For instance, in the case of India, for migrating to Africa or GCC countries for domestic work, a woman should attain at least 30 years of age. Similarly, the Government of Nepal initially had banned the migration of women under the age of 30 years to the Gulf countries. Recently, this was changed to 24 years (Bashyal, 2019). Apart from placing age-caps, restrictions are also imposed through licensing the channel of migration. For example, in India, the recruitment of domestic help and nurses to GCC countries are restricted through certain licensed agencies¹¹ (Remesh, 2019).

From the governments' perspectives, the above restrictions in policies concerning the recruitment and migration of women are preventive mechanisms against trafficking and possible ill-treatment of these women in their destination countries. Bashyal (2019) points out that the Nepal government has time and again restricted the migration of women to certain destinations (see Box 3.1) to "safeguard women from exploitation and abuse". However, such a viewpoint is problematic as it purports that the solution for increased violence on migrant women lies in disallowing them from migrating in the first place (Kodoth, 2016). Here, it needs to be seen that though it is primarily intended for 'protecting women', the net result is controlling and discouraging the female migration, whereas state policies are often actively and systematically facilitating men's migration. Further, the prevailing restrictive framework and the risk of having the responsibility in the event of women facing physical and sexual assaults in the destination, often discourage the agents to recruit women (Bashyal, 2019).

¹¹Often, such licensing also leads to an increase in the cost of migration, which propels a person to undertake unauthorised and undocumented means to emigrate and hence exposing themselves to the risk of being exploited (Remesh, 2019).

Box 3.1: Controls on Migration of Women Domestic Workers from Nepal

Earlier, Lebanon was a major destination for Nepali domestic workers. In 2007-08, 2,490 Nepali women migrated to Lebanon from Nepal. However, to 'protect' women, the Government of Nepal banned women's migration to Lebanon for domestic work in 2009. By 2012-13, the number of women migrants as domestics to Lebanon dipped to 369 as a result of the ban. Later on, countries such as the UAE, Malaysia, Kuwait and Qatar became prominent destinations for Nepali female domestic workers.

Until 2010, the Government of Nepal restricted the employment of female Nepali workers in the informal sector and domestic work in the GCC countries. Later on, in 2010, the government rolled back this ban, which resulted in an unprecedented growth of female migration into the Gulf region. In 2011-12, Nepal women constituted about 90 per cent of the total female labour migrants in the GCC countries.

In 2012, the Government of Nepal introduced a temporary ban on younger women (less than 30 years of age) migrating to the Gulf region. In 2014, this ban was extended to all ages and then in 2015, a partial relaxation was allowed by fixing the minimum age for migration of women as 24.

Despite all these restrictions, women's migration for work has increased over time, as migration through irregular channels flourished during this period of official bans and age-restrictions.

Source: Bashyal (2019).

Until recently, Sri Lanka was an exemption to the model of 'restrictive state' in terms of female migration. Unlike other countries of South Asia, women's migration was effectively supported by the government in earlier times, by taking a lead in determining the outflow of women through bilateral negotiations and agreements with labour receiving countries. As a result, by 2007-08, Sri Lankan women even outnumbered men in terms of migrating overseas for work (Arambepola, 2019). During this period, the government also instituted training programmes to 'improve' domestic work-related skills of the prospective female migrants and welfare measures like insurance scheme have been launched (Arambepola, 2019). However, the government has also made a U-turn about this supportive stand in recent years.

In 2013, following a particular incident concerning female domestic workers in the Gulf region¹², the government banned the migration of under-aged women and women with young children in Sri Lanka. Subsequently, a new regulation, Family Background Report (FBR), was introduced. As per this, to migrate, the prospective women migrants have to get a “clearance” from the Foreign Employment Development Officer (FEDO) of the respective Divisional Secretariat (DS) office. The FEDO is entrusted with collecting data on the women’s family background and is empowered to disallow their migration, if the children in the family are left with no proper female guardian and/or if there are children under 5 years of age or children with disability in the family¹³ (Arambepola, 2019). FBR is considered as a highly discriminatory regulation (ILO-SL, 2018; Abeysekera & Jayasundere, 2015; Arambepola, 2019) as it goes against the fundamental principle of ensuring equal opportunity for men and women to migrate (see Box 3.2 for more details).

Box 3.2: Some Implications of FBR on Women’s Migration from Sri Lanka

- **Drastic Decline in Female Migration:** Due to the introduction of the FBR, there was a considerable decline in the unskilled, female migration from Sri Lanka for work overseas. Analysing the data available from Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment for the period 1986 to 2016 shows that before the introduction of this policy measure, when the female migration was at its peak, around three-fourth of total stock migrants from Sri Lanka were women. But, after the FBR came into effect, the number of women migrating dropped considerably, and in 2016, their total migration was only about one-third of the total stock of migrants.
- **Reduced Preference for Female Migrants:** The rigidities in the framework for the free migration of women, often results in a reduced preference for female migrants from Sri Lanka by the receiving countries. For instance, Arambepola (2019) states that new recruitment drives to countries such as Korea and Japan focus mostly on male migrant workers, though this preference is not overtly stated.

¹²In 2013, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) failed to stop the execution of Rizana Nafeek, an under-aged Sri Lankan domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. The public outcry following this incident resulted in a reactionary step from GoSL which sought to impose restrictions on women’s migration rather than focusing on strengthening welfare and protection of women migrant workers.

¹³There is a review committee to finally decide on the information gathered by the FEDO. Apart from this, there is an appealing provision.

- **Disabling Policy Intervention:** The FBR denies women’s right to migrate. As many of these women migrants are essentially migrating abroad to ensure the wellbeing of their families, particularly their children.
- **Class-Bias:** Jayasundera and Abeysekera (2015) argues that the FBR unfairly targets the lower-class, unskilled and semi-skilled female workers, rather than the middle-class female professionals.
- **Echoing Patriarchal Norms:** The FBR has a strong discriminatory element, as its clearance is only required for women, whereas men are free to migrate. The regulation also echoes the patriarchal ethos and traditional societal norms concerning the division of labour, as women are primarily viewed as caregivers of the family.
- **Shifting Role of State:** The Introduction and implementation of the FBR is a strong indication of the role-shifting of the government. It is evident that it is changing from a welfare-providing and protecting one to that of a regulating state, which is based more on paternalistic and patriarchal values, keeping women within the ‘desirable borders’ of family and society.
- **Losing Validity of Data Sources:** The growth in illegal and undocumented migration (in the aftermath of FBR) is not captured in official data sources. Thus, FBR also had led to a situation where the validity of official data sources on international migration from Sri Lanka is highly questionable

Source: Arambepola (2019).

FBR in Sri Lanka is a glaring example for the shifting approach of the state where its proactive and supportive stand is being replaced by a reactive and orthodox stand, which is in tune with the traditional patriarchal norms - based on male-breadwinner and female-care giver models.

It is understood that to circumvent the FBR regulations, many prospective female migrants are finding alternative means for reaching their destination countries, often with the help of traffickers and illegal recruitment agencies. For instance, Weeraratne (2016) explains that in recent years the flow of women from Sri Lanka as “tourists” to West Asia and Gulf countries has increased. The growth of such illegal migration also suggests that women migrants from the country are becoming more vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe

migration (ILO, 2018). The US State Department's "Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, 2017" also notes that FBR regulation has increased the risk of human trafficking.

3.5. Undocumented Migration: An Outgrowth of Rigid Regulatory Framework?

As seen in the case of FBR, due to rigid systems of controls that restrict female migration, the women migrants from South Asian countries are found resorting to various means of illegal and undocumented migration. Given that many countries in South Asia have restrictions that discourage women from migrating, women who are desperately seeking to migrate and fetch a more remunerative occupation often resort to illegal channels of migration, bypassing and circumventing the governmental restrictions. In certain cases, women migrate to their destinations as tourists and then stay back to be engaged as workers. As mentioned earlier, in the case of Sri Lanka, Weeraratne (2016) points out that the number of women migrating as "tourists" to West Asia and specific countries within Asia has increased, following the state restrictions on women's migration. Bashyal (2019) also supports this argument by citing that more and more women from Nepal are using irregular channels (i.e. transiting via India) to circumvent periodic bans introduced by the Government of Nepal to restrict women's migration to certain countries.

Quite often, women migrate with the help of illegal agents and traffickers, who arrange their travel to preferred destinations. Some of these women first move to a neighbouring country, which is chosen as transit location, and then eventually migrate to their final destinations. As the quantum of migration of women decreases, the commission rates for recruitment agents are also found soaring up, which inter alia lead to even situations where the recruitment agents lure or incentivise prospective women migrants to move out of their native countries through illegal ways. To cite an example, Arambepola (2019) explains that in Sri Lanka, in the aftermath of the recent regulations imposed on women's migration to the GCC countries, women who are willing to work as domestic workers in West Asian countries are often incentivised by offering a lump-sum payment, which need not be repaid (a one-off financial payment). Such offers are difficult to resist for women, who are actively seeking for various alternatives to get rid of debt traps and for supporting their needy family¹⁴.

The recruitment agents or traffickers 'smuggle' the women migrants either directly from their native countries to destination countries (mostly GCC) or

through via transit routes (e.g. India or Pakistan). An example is the case of Nepali women, who choose India as a transit in their final migration to the Gulf countries. Bashyal (2019) explains that as a result of age restrictions imposed on women's migration for work to the Middle East countries, there is a visible increase in women's trafficking and illegal migration, where Nepali women are found trafficked, either directly or through transit routes via India and then to the Gulf countries (see Box 3.3). The open borders between India and Nepal and minimal formalities involved in cross-border migration help the traffickers and aspirant women migrants to use India as a transit location.

Box 3.3: Trafficking of Nepali Women for Domestic Work in Saudi Arabia

The Himalayan Times on 17 December 2018 reported about the increasing incidents of trafficking of women domestic workers from Nepal to Saudi Arabia. It is reported that for each of the trafficked women, the smugglers earn around Rs. 4,00,000. These smuggling rackets have their offices and networks in Ajman of the UAE and Kuwait city. Quoting the National Report on Trafficking in Persons in Nepal by the National Human Rights Commission, it is further stated that about 90 per cent of domestic workers are forced to sign two labour contracts—one in Nepal and other in their destination-country—with drastically different terms and conditions. Due to the signing of different contracts, they often fail to avail legal recourse in Nepal. Yet another point highlighted in this media article is about the exorbitant charges paid by these migrants to the recruiting agents for accessing their jobs in Gulf countries.

Source: Bashyal (2019).

Often, the restrictions imposed on women's free migration eventually result in an increased quantum of illegal/undocumented migration, which pushes women into riskier zones and make them more vulnerable for exploitative working and living conditions (including physical and sexual abuse). Availing of 'irregular channels' also results in an 'invisibility of women's migration' as their particulars are not documented in the official records. Such unreported migrations also keep them out of the purview of supportive mechanisms of their governments, as their shifting of docile is not captured by official figures/data.

The issues arising out of such undocumented migration are many. Oftentimes, the undocumented migration implies a higher cost of migration, as recruitment agents charges exorbitant rates from prospective migrants in many cases. Further to this, in several cases,

¹⁴Arambepola (2019) explains that many women in Sri Lanka are in debt traps due to the micro-credit facilities and for these women, migration is the only option left for rescuing their families from financial liabilities.

the migrants are duped with fake documents. Nuepane (2018) in an article published in The Kathmandu Post reports that about 60 women from Nepal were rescued in India in 2017-18 alone while attempting to migrate to the Gulf countries using fake documents.

From the discussions so far in this chapter, it is evident that patriarchal norms are heavily influencing the patterns of women's international migration in South Asian countries. It is also evident that these norms have become further strengthened during the recent times with the strengthening of the neoliberal states in the region. Compared to earlier times, it is evident that women's migration has been viewed more through a patriarchal lens, in which 'guarding' the women from abuses and 'confining' women to their traditionally assigned roles have become the dominating concerns while formulating policies concerning women's international migration.

Evidence from South Asian countries suggests that patriarchal and familial norms have been strongly present in the internal migration contexts, too, as marriage and this chapter will have some focused discussion on the importance of marriage and family in women's migration.

3.6. Women's Migration: Linkages to Marriage and Family

As the South Asian societies are deeply embedded in traditional and patriarchal norms, the migration decisions of women are often highly intertwined with societal norms regarding women's participation in the labour market and women's mobility outside the familial space. Thus, migration outside their native societies is often restricted due to familial consideration. Many of the women migrate outside their villages following their marriage or to facilitate marriage. In certain cases, women (and children) migrate to join their husbands who have already migrated to a destination. Accordingly, marriage and familial concerns have been the most important drivers of migration in South Asian countries – be it is internal or international migration.

In Bhutan, though the women's share in the international migration is minimal, even these limited stock of women migrants are mostly family members of officers with international postings with the government and international organisations (Dhakal, 2019). In Nepal, women from far-western Tarai are found migrating to India due to cross-border marriage practices.

In India, for more than 70 per cent of migrating women, marriage is cited as one of the major reasons (Remesh, 2019). Parsa (2019) explains that though women's

migration for work has been very insignificant in Afghanistan, the proportions of women migrating to join their family and migrating due to marriage are quite high in Afghanistan¹⁵.

The importance attached to marriage and familial concerns in matters related to migration in South Asian societies is largely on account of the underlying patriarchal considerations, based on male-breadwinner and female-follower models. In some of the South Asian countries, the restrictions are found being imposed on the migration of women, without a husband or an authorised escort¹⁶. This shows the importance of patriarchal norms in shaping women's migration in South Asia.

Migration of women is also strongly linked to the poverty levels of their families. For instance, in Afghanistan, traditional norms such as heavy dowries for marriage and huge marriage expenses are found as major reasons for the migration of women (Parsa, 2019). In India too, there are cases where women migrate from rural to urban areas to earn dowries or to save enough money for having a settled family life. The much-discussed case of Sumangali Scheme in Southern India is an example of this (Box 3.4). In this system, young women were found migrating and working in textile factories for earning sufficient dowry to get married. In another case, again from India, poor brides from far-off states are 'bought' and brought to Haryana and Rajasthan in North India, where these brides ultimately end up in farm work for the families of their husbands¹⁷ (see Box 3.5).

Box 3.4: Sumangali Scheme in Tamil Nadu, India

Sumangali Scheme is a form of 'soft-trafficking', which is found practised especially in the textiles and garments industries in certain parts of Tamil Nadu, a southern state in India. As per this scheme, young girls are hired for three- to five-year contract work in knitwear, spinning and garment factories and are paid a lump sum amount after completing the contractual tenure. The system, which is widely understood as one that helps young girls to earn some money towards paying dowry for their weddings, is often found tying these young-women workers with lower payments and poor working conditions.

Source: Remesh (2019).

¹⁵The Afghanistan Living Condition Survey, 2016-17 found that about 1/5 (i.e. 19 per cent) of Afghan women have migrated to join their families that already lived elsewhere, and another 14.1 per cent of Afghan female migrants have migrated for marriage (Parsa, 2019).

¹⁶For example, during the Taliban regime, migration of women without husband or an authorised guardian was banned in Afghanistan (Parsa, 2019).

¹⁷Yet another example is the migration of nurses from South India, motivated by the objective of collecting dowry or saving enough to get married, to the GCC and West Asian countries as well as developed countries such as the US, the UK, Australia etc. (Remesh, 2019).

It is particularly important to explore the connection between marriage migration and the labour markets. It has been shown that many women, who move to newer places following marriage eventually enter the labour markets in their spouses' native lands. In certain cases, they even migrate further from there to seek better jobs. This is a crucial aspect that explains the 'hidden labour migration' behind the stream of marriage migration.

Box 3.5: Paro and Molki - Bought Wives in Haryana and Rajasthan

At times, marriage migration can also be linked to trafficking, where women from socio-economically weaker sections are brought to distant places through coercion or by deceitful practices. The trafficked women are also sold off in states with lower sex ratio such as Haryana, Rajasthan as Paro or Molki. The sold bride is constantly under surveillance by people around her. The groom's family fear that if she is left alone, she might run away. Owing to the idea that she has been purchased, these women are expected to perform unpaid work in the home and agricultural field along with the reproductive roles in the family.

Source: Remesh (2019).

Parsa, 2019 also explains that poor families in Afghanistan often sell their young girls as a coping strategy (see Box 3.6). Many of these girls also eventually move out of their native places and become migrants in their new destinations. There are also situations where women migrate to escape domestic violence and early and forced marriages¹⁸.

Box 3.6: Sold Brides in Afghanistan

The impoverished and the most vulnerable families in Afghanistan usually perpetrate the sale of their young daughters or choose forced marriage of their young daughters as a coping mechanism for the extreme vulnerability inflicted upon them by forced displacements and poverty. Akhtar Mohammad, a displaced person in Herat, told to Afghanistan Times (2018): "As the heads of the families are unable to feed their households, so they are compelled to sell their small daughters for Afs 45,000 to 50,000 to minimally support the lives of other members of families". Mohammad Eiwaz Fardi, another displaced person, said to the same source, "I have a small daughter and ready to sell her to anyone who is ready to buy her. I have to sell her because our children are dying of hunger inflicted by famine and starvation. Anyone who is ready to give me Afs 50,000 to 60,000 (less than 800 USD), can take away my daughter".

Source: Parsa (2019).

3.7. Women's Migration: Some Generic Issues

Irrespective of the category of migration (i.e. internal or international) or the countries of origin of women's migration, women migrants have some issues in common.

In all the South Asian countries, in terms of socio-economic indicators, the status of women is low in almost every indicator. Due to this, women constitute the most vulnerable segment within the already vulnerable group of migrants. Women migrants, compared to their male counterpart, often face discrimination in the labour market concerning lower wages and adverse working conditions (e.g. longer hours of work, absence of basic facilities and confinement to lower work). Adding to this, quite often sexual harassment at the workplace is also a major problem. Trafficking is another crucial aspect which is associated with women's migration. In several instances, women who are from socio-economically weaker segments of the society, become victims of trafficking. Quite often, even the anti-trafficking laws tend to penalise the victims.

As explained earlier, in certain cases, 'women only' migration is restricted legally or in practice. The age restrictions on the migration of women to the GCC countries is an example of legal restriction. The Jodi (pair) system exist in informal labour markets in Northern India (and in many other parts) is another example. Here, the labour recruiters and employers will consider employing women only if they are joining the work along with their husbands¹⁹ (Remesh, 2019).

Both the cases cited above show some underlying patriarchal considerations related to women's migration. In the first case, women below a particular year are considered helpless and thus to be protected by law. This prima facie solution appears to be a supportive intervention. But, in effect, it may also create barriers for women to freely migrate. At times, to circumvent the law, some of them may even resort to illegal ways of migration, eventually falling prey to the uncouth practices of middlemen and traffickers.

The single woman migrants or women along groups of migrants, who migrate through middlemen, are made to stay in deplorable condition with 15-20 people in a single room and poor hygiene facilities. Because of their dependence on middlemen for employment and stay, they are left alone and vulnerable, both before being placed for work and even after placement. Their salaries are partially paid, their documents are withheld and are harassed by the middlemen. Many of these girls are even duped by middlemen and are later sold in the cities. Sometimes, women, after migrating to cities, are contracted diseases such as HIV and cancer. Such cases are also attached to the notion of purity, and their families are boycotted back in villages on the ground of breaking social norms.

¹⁸For example, traditional norms followed in Afghanistan deny the women from choosing their life partners, and at times, some of these women who were into forced marriage situations, find migration as an escape (Parsa, 2019). Similar situations are reported in most of the countries in South Asia, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

¹⁹Accordingly, in many factories and workplaces in North India, one can see married couples working together. Some of the field studies show that even some unmarried girls access such Jodi jobs, by showing one of the male worker in the workplace as her husband. Such arrangements sometimes lead to more complicated issues like wage-theft, rent-seeking and other pernicious practices by the fake husbands (Remesh, 2019).

It is important to note that migrant women are not a homogenous group and thus the issues concerning various streams of women migration vary considerably. Accordingly, it is very important to capture the issues concerning the specificities of distinct categories of women's migration – such as migration of tribal women to cities for domestic work, migration of rural women for work in factories (e.g. garment sector, fish processing industry) and informal sector jobs (brick kiln work). In most such situations, women migrant workers are found trapped in exploitative work conditions and confined workplaces. Even in the international segment, we can see women migrants moving to far-off countries and work and live in difficult conditions as nurses, factory workers and informal sector workers. The “Kafala system” of Saudi Arabia associates an immigrant with an employer, which s/he cannot change as per their will. This dependence on the employer leads to exploitation of these women²⁰.

There have been many cases where these immigrant women are being exploited. Trafficking, sex trade and organ trade always appear in the policy debate concerning female migration. Apart from the mental harassment in the destination country, these women, when they move to another country, leaving back their family and children, they are sometime looked down upon by their family members as well as the society. She is tormented by the family members back home, as she is unable to fulfil the duty of being a mother and a caregiver for elderly parents. Reena Kukhreja, a researcher and film-maker, captures this dilemma of female migrants very effectively in her documentary film, ‘Delhi Bound for Work (2009).

Migration trajectories are, thus, judged in a narrow gendered lens that frames women as victims and as caregivers rather than workers. Such a perspective also leads to social labelling of female migrants as “loose women”. Arambepola (2019) explains the case of juki girls or garment girls in Sri Lanka who are subjected to strong social branding and ghettoised living (see Box 3.7 below).

²⁰In a recent incident where hands of a women, from South India working as domestic help in Saudi Arabia, were chopped off by the family where she worked. This case generated lots of discussion in the country about the plight of Indian domestic workers in the GCC. However, as of now, India does not have any policy which can protect its citizens working in different countries, from any form of physical or mental exploitation.

Box 3.7: Juki Girls or Garment Girls in Sri Lanka

Labelled as “juki girls”, the young women encounter social stigma and exclusion in their everyday lives (Hewamanne, 2008). They occupy specific public spaces outside of the EPZ and their dress code and behaviour are used as markers to differentiate them as ‘garment girls’. The high concentrations of young men and women in these urban EPZs have also resulted in a form of ghettoisation, as the migrant workers seek to carve out a space for themselves within that particular local community.

Source: Arambepola (2019).

The deplorable situations prevailing for internal female migrants working in the garment sector of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are widely documented and discussed. Similar are the situations of women from South Asian countries working in garment factories of far-off countries in West Asia like Jordan (see Box 3.8).

Box 3.8: South Asian Migrants in Garment Factories of Jordan

- As per estimates of ILO and independent researchers, around 50,000-60,000 migrant garment employees are in Jordan, constituting 70-75 per cent of female workers in the sector. They work in export-oriented production, including that for US brands such as Nike, Under Armour and Target.
- These female workers are mostly from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.
- The issues faced by these migrant workers include: Trafficking, discrimination in terms of wages, irregular payment and denial of salaries, confiscation of passports and important documents, cramped living conditions and violation of basic labour rights.

Source: ILO (2017).

It is important to note that the prominence of marriage as the major reason for migration has been declining over time. In certain cases, the women's migration is followed by migration of spouse and families – thereby reverting the conventional model of 'women as follower migrant'. For instance, in recent times, migration of Indian nurses to European countries and the United States are often followed by the migration of their spouses. One needs to note that the growing number of single women migration or women's only migration is also indicative of the desperate situation of socio-economic deprivation that these women experience in their native countries. To get rid of their financial backwardness, women often risk their lives and take up jobs in exceedingly difficult circumstances. The recent case of Indian nurses trapped in ISIS-affected areas is a striking example.

Saidi (2017) reports a case of 'migration of mothers' from Afghanistan to Europe which has become more prominent in recent years. Most of these women had been affected by war and were forced to flee. They may not necessarily accompany their husband while moving to another country as many women's husband themselves get killed in the war. To increase their chance of acceptance of asylum plea, these women are sometimes forced to leave their children behind. The desperation to escape the harsh situation is so intense that they may even accompany the ghachaghbar (smugglers) (Parsa, 2019).

3.8. Concluding Remarks

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the women's positioning within the migration scenario of South Asian countries is drastically getting transformed. On the one hand, more and more women are pushing into or aspiring to get into migration streams stretching beyond their country borders, on the other hand, the states and regulatory frameworks of migration are becoming increasingly rigid. Here, what is evident is the dominance and spread of patriarchal controls in the governance framework of women's migration. The discussion also explains about the invisible or hidden aspects of women's migration for work. In certain cases, women's migration is not getting documented as many of these migrants opt to use illegal and irregular channels to circumvent the restrictive policies. In certain other cases, migration for work is hidden within 'marriage migration'. It is also evident that women migrants face more challenges and difficulties in migration and afterwards compared to their male counter-parts. Discriminations in labour markets, victimisation in the hands of traffickers, social labelling and exclusion, ghettoised living and so on are certain issues that are important to mention here. Given all these, what is required is to have concerted efforts from all stakeholders (including governments) to ensure safe and informed migration for women.

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CHAPTER

4

Poverty and Inequality in South Asia: State Responses

Poverty and Inequality in South Asia: State Responses

Akhil Ranjan Dutta

"The key social, economic and political concern of our times, both domestically and globally, ought to be inequality, not simply poverty. Poverty has been far easier to address and to reduce, inequality, far more complicated, almost near impossible. Poverty is seen by most, especially the well-to-do and privileged, as a moral issue, with some economic and social consequences. Inequality, on the other hand, is clearly a political issue, requiring far greater understanding and action."

—Zaidi, S. Akbar (2017)

4.1. Introduction

The present chapter investigates the responses of the states in South Asia towards the crucial driving forces of migration, i.e. poverty and inequality. Issues of poverty and inequality have wider dimensions—agrarian crises and rural distress, joblessness, climatic catastrophe, resource appropriation, withdrawal of the state from the essential public services, gender inequalities and so on. Growing poverty and inequality in the region are structurally embedded into the neoliberal policy regimes all across the states in the region. Therefore, investigation of the policies on poverty and inequality starts with a short reflection on the neo-liberal regimes in the region followed by a critical investigation of the policy framework of addressing poverty and inequality by the states in the region.

4.2. State's Dilemma in South Asia

South Asia Inequality Report, 2019 of SAAPE reveals that 'South Asia's share of the poor in the globe increased from 27.3 per cent to 33.4 per cent between 1990-2013, leaving behind only Sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for the largest share (50.7 per cent) of the global poor'. Quoting data from the 2018 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), the report also shows the high incidences of poverty in Nepal (35.3 per cent), Bangladesh (41.1 per cent) and Pakistan (43.9). Compared to these countries, India has progressed well by reducing its poverty to 27.5 per cent. However, the country, which has added a few more billionaires to its list, has still a long way to go to bring poverty to an acceptable level. Inequality

in the South Asian region is spread over all important indicators— accumulation of wealth, landlessness, gender deprivations, access to secure work, access to basic services like healthcare and sanitation, tax benefits accorded by the respective governments and so on. Top rich 1 per cent in the countries of the region has accumulated wealth that is nearly as much as the rest 99 per cent combined, making the region most unequal globally (SAAPE, 2019).

The worsening state of poverty and inequality is the outcome of the neoliberal development agendas embraced by the states of South Asia. The states in the region have indulged in transferring common resources like land, forest and water to the corporate houses, which have resulted in the phenomenon of accumulation on the part of the rich by dispossession of the poor. At the same time, the states have also pursued populist policies to address growing dissatisfactions among citizens. For example, Ayushman Bharat in India and Ehsaas in case of Pakistan, have been two such overly ambitious populist schemes that aim to allay the distress of the commons. Populism has also become competitive from one regime to the other. The populist policies, however, have been largely failing to bring common masses out of miseries. An important reason for the failure lies in the fact that the neoliberal economy structurally pushes people to the margin, and the populist policies pursued by the neoliberal states attempt to give temporary relief without touching upon the structural inequities. As a result, people are forced to move out under distress, both within the country and beyond. International agencies continue to focus on common peoples' miseries which force the national governments to initiate schemes and policies to address them. Electoral compulsions also force the government to undertake such populist measures. These populist measures, pursued within the framework of global financial institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, are fragmented in nature and are aimed at creating chronically dependent citizens. While the issue of eradicating poverty has much significance in the policy frameworks; however, inequality has not been an issue at all in the state policy discourses. Therefore, the states have succeeded to an extent in eradicating poverty, but inequality has risen to an alarming extent across all social and economic indicators.

4.3. Neoliberal Regimes in South Asia

Neoliberalism is not necessarily the withdrawal of the state as a regulatory institution. Rather, it is more about the shift in the nature of regulation, priorities and the complete overhauling of the personnel in the state institutions which favours the big capital and the elites. David Harvey argues that the neoliberal state collapses 'the notion of freedom into freedom for economic elites'. 'The freedoms it embodies reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations and financial capital' (Harvey, 2005, p. 7). For Harvey, the current global neoliberal regime, which he also defines as the 'New Imperialism', is characterised by 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2003, p. 145). This process include '... commodification and privatisation of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; the conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights; the suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labor power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption...' (Harvey, 2003, p. 45).

How does the state respond under the neoliberal framework? States assume an authoritarian posture, but at the same time strive for social legitimacy. Prabhat Patnaik illustrates this structural shift in acquiring social legitimacy by the neoliberal state and argues that social legitimacy 'is sought to be acquired by such regimes through other means: by invoking an enemy that is a common foe of the entire society, against which the state is projected as engaging in struggle; or by uniting society for a common purpose behind some imperialist project of acquiring "glory" or "national pride"' (2017). In South Asia, particularly in India and Pakistan, both these tendencies are very strong.

With the end of the cold war, the countries of South Asia formally opened up the respective national economies both for structural adjustment programmes as well as for the global market forces. These changes were mostly steered by technocrats trained in IMF-World Bank than by the mandate of the people²¹. Almost all important economic policy making institutions in the respective countries, particularly in India, were filled by technocrats to facilitate negotiations with the global financial institutions (Arunabha, 2006). Starting from the devaluation of the rupee to financial and banking sector reforms as well as redefining the state's role in social security was framed as per IMF-

²¹In India, the economic reforms were introduced in 1991 by a minority government led by the then Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao. However, there were no debates on the proposed reforms during election campaigns. There were allegations that the reform process was drafted and dictated by global financial institutions.

World Bank requirements. Policies in all domains—from agriculture to industry, education to health and environment to forest—conformed to the IMF-World Bank norms. In the case of the India, for example, the economy became the revolving door of the World Bank-IMF (Kelly & D'Souza, 2010). The countries have witnessed enormous growth, although with ups and downs, under reforms. A consensus across the mainstream political parties and the bureaucracy also evolved regarding the inevitability of the reform process. Eventually, these reforms brought enormous inequality. The authoritarian tendencies are evident both at the political and economic domains.

Box 4.1: Does Obsession with Economic Growth Make Life Worthwhile

In 1984, as the Presidential Candidate of the US, Robert Kennedy said it so correctly that obsession with economic growth just ignores what makes life worthwhile.

He said that GDP "measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."

Even after more than fifty years now, tragically, we continue to be 'obsessed with this flawed metric as the key indicator of economic success. We are trapped in a way of thinking that says, "bigger is better," that higher GDP is the solution to our problems.'

Source: Scharmer, O. (2018). Our obsession with economic growth ignores everything that makes life worthwhile. Huffpost, 6 June. Available at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/opinion-scharmer-gdp-economic-growth_n_5ac6160de4b056a8f598db31.

There are both uniform and particular trends under neoliberal regimes in South Asia. The most common trends have been an obsession with growth, privatisation of banks and other public institutions, prioritising profit over distribution and social justice, informalisation of the economy and services, transfer of common resources to the private and the corporate. The struggle for hegemony between China and India also intensified under the neoliberal regimes in South Asia. Among other marginal categories, women have been increasingly subjected to coercion and violence. Patriarchy has shown its ugly head in different forms, particularly through informalisation and feminisation of labour.

Box 4.2: Struggle for Hegemony Between India and China Creates Turmoil in Sri Lanka

Chinese capital entered the Sri Lankan economy in a big way. China has a huge dominance in Sri Lanka including its capital city Colombo in almost all sectors. India, the traditional power in South Asia has been striving hard to compete with China and 'is muscling into port and other projects, pushing back hard against China.' India is afraid of China building military outposts just off its southern coast.

The battle between the two powers is creating political turmoil in Sri Lanka. 'A bust-up between President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe over how far to accommodate Indian interests is a key reason the nation's unity government has just fallen apart, government officials and foreign diplomats said.'

Source: Reuters. (8 November 2018). Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-politics-china-india-insigh/behind-sri-lankas-turmoil-a-china-india-struggle-for-investments-and-influence-idUSKCN1ND0D1>.

While the state withdraws from its social commitment, at the same time manufactures political discourses in such a way that diverts the attention of the people from day to day security to the territorial security of the nation. Obsessive nationalism has been a significant trend under neoliberalism. In the process, the neoliberal state indulges in both manufacturing inequality and enemies²².

4.4. State Policies on Poverty

UNDP's Annual Human Development Report, 2016, titled 'Human Development for Everyone', defines human development as the expansion of human freedoms: 'freedom to realize the full potential of every human life, not just of a few, nor of most, but of all lives in every corner of the world—now and in the future.' The report, while assessing the achievements in the past quarter-century (i.e. since the Human Development reports were inaugurated in 1990), has pointed out that the achievements made so far has been very impressive on many fronts as people now live longer and more people have come out of extreme poverty as well as malnutrition. However, at the same time, humanity continues to face some important challenges like deprivations which is lingering, inequality which is deepening and violent extremism which is emerging and spreading very fast. The report has particularly focused on the poor,

²²Examples include processes like demonetisation and the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India, which have caused devastation of the commons. These developments have also been accompanied by high-voltage nationalist rhetoric.

marginalised and the vulnerable groups who have been 'left furthest behind'. The groups include 'ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, refugees and migrants' (UNDP, 2016). The report, however, is optimistic about overcoming these challenges on the ground that the governments across the globe have pledged to subdue the challenges through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The UNDP report advocates that to achieve universalism in human development the only option is to pursue inclusive growth. It states: 'For human development to reach everyone, growth has to be inclusive, with four mutually supporting pillars—formulating an employment-led growth strategy, enhancing financial inclusion, investing in human development priorities and undertaking high-impact multidimensional interventions (win-win strategies)' (UNDP, 2016, p. 11).

It is both relevant and important to point out that the journey of the UNDP human development project has also been accompanied by the journey of the market orthodoxy of the World Bank-IMF led neoliberal approach to development. The UNDP has been providing a comprehensive critique of the growth obsessive development agendas of the neoliberal regimes. This is evident from Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze's critique of India's development trajectory (Dreze & Sen, 2013). Now, the states are in a fix. They are obliged to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but politically determined to pursue the neoliberal policies. Therefore, the policies on poverty and inequality have been of a cloak that covers up the neoliberal orthodoxies rather than questioning them. It addresses the issues of poverty in terms of reducing it but leaves out the issue of inequality. The countries of South Asia are no exception to it.

The state policies addressing poverty can be broadly discussed under the following heads:

- a. Rural development, livelihood and employment
- b. Microcredit and financial inclusion
- c. Cash transfer benefits
- d. Job guarantee and skill development programmes/schemes
- e. Universal insurance schemes
- f. Housing schemes
- g. Climate change and adaptability schemes

4.4.1 Rural Development, Livelihood and Employment

One of the core manifestations of poverty and inequality in South Asia has been the growing rural distress. Between 1995 and 2015, more than 3 lakh farmers committed suicide in India alone. Rural distress, in turn, has been one of the prime drivers of migration across South Asia, as we have seen in Chapter 2 of this report.

Therefore, to deal with rural distress, states in the region have been pursuing a series of policies and schemes. However, the nature of policy interventions has been changing under neoliberal regimes. For example, in India after the country had achieved independence, one of the important approaches to rural poverty had been to address the issue of landlessness on the part of the farmers/tillers. There were movements all over the country demanding land to the tillers. Land reforms were one of the initiatives to deal with the landlessness through which the highest ceiling on land ownership was fixed and excess lands were acquired by the state for redistribution among those who were landless.

To deal with the issue of the ever-increasing demand for loans in the countryside, the bank nationalisation

was undertaken. This helped to expand the network of nationalised banks to rural areas. Formal lending in the rural areas increased substantially, benefitting both the agricultural and other priority sectors after banks were nationalised in 1969. Land reforms did not achieve success primarily due to vested interests within the state machinery like the loyalty of the bureaucracy to the land-owning classes (Kohli, 1987). The issue has disappeared from the state discourses after the economic reforms were introduced. The public banking sector has also come under attack, and there has been a contraction in the rural banking. This has gradually been recaptured by informal lending and NGO-driven microfinancing. All these have aggravated the crises in the economy in general and the rural economy in particular.

Box 4.3: Policies Are Crucial Towards Revamping the Agricultural Sector

As India witnesses the intensity of crises in the rural economy today and growing farmers protests, policy analysts have pointed out that the shift in policies plays a vital role in revamping the economy. During 1998-2014, agriculture in the country grew by just 1.7%. However, the rural economy bounced back after 2004, and the agriculture registered growth at 3.84% per annum between 2004-05 and 2012-13. Apart from all other factors, this acceleration in growth was 'led by an increase in credit availability to agriculture, a rise in farm investment and MSP policies that helped shift the terms of trade in favour of agriculture.' Although, the period witnessed partially fuelled food inflation, it led to 'higher incomes for farmers and a general increase in the wage rate of labour that was unprecedented since the 1980s.'

The MSP of paddy was hiked from Rs. 560 per quintal in 2004-05 to Rs. 1,310 per quintal in 2013-14 while that of wheat from Rs. 640 per quintal in 2004-05 to Rs. 1,400 per quintal in 2013-14. All these contributed towards higher incomes in the hands of the farmers, which in turn, helped in the growth of demand in the rural economy.

Source: Himangshu. (2019). India's farm crisis: Decades-old and with deep roots. Ideas for India, 12 April. Available at <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/agriculture/indias-farm-crisis-decades-old-and-with-deep-roots.html>.

Granting land rights is out of the question in government schemes and approaches. Demand for minimum support prices has also been addressed in a casual manner. The governments have been addressing rural distress through a few initiatives. One important among them is the employment guarantee scheme as is the case in India. The MGNREGA, enacted in 2005, is projected as a tool of ending poverty in all forms. The scheme is so ambitious that by the year 2030 it targets to eradicate extreme poverty for all people in India. 'In addition, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), with the other core schemes, is expected to help reduce the population living under conditions of poverty by at least half, implement central social protection systems and measures, ensure equal rights to various productive assets and capitals and build

the resilience of vulnerable sections of the population against economic, social, and environmental shocks, and seasonal uncertainties by the year 2030' (Jatav & Chakraborty, 2019).

MGNREGS, which is a demand-driven scheme, assures 100 days employment to an unskilled person of a household against demand, has, however, has a lot of loopholes both in meeting the demands and in the implementation process. The MGNREGA has been dying a slow death despite the government's tall claims of 'record allocations' and 92 per cent on-time payment generation' (Nandy, 2018). Apart from the failure to meet the mandated 100 days of work, there have been a lot of issues. For example, in the majority of the states in India, the MGNREGA wage is less than the minimum wage of the respective states. This has led to a decline in the interest on the part of the genuine work seekers,

facilitating the way to control the programme by the middlemen and contractors. The fund flow has not been smooth either. There have also been allegations that 'genuine job cards are being randomly deleted as there is a huge administrative pressure to meet 100 per cent Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) implementation targets in MGNREGA' (Nandy, 2018).

Box 4.4: MNREGA: A Pro-poor Initiative

MGNREGA has been one of the pro-poor initiatives introduced under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in 2005. It was an outcome of the Common Minimum Programme worked out by the unique political coalition that constituted the UPA.

This scheme brought in some crucial benefits:

- It provided a floor minimum wage
- It provided a fall back employment option
- It helped to arrest acute distress-driven migration from rural areas.

At the same time, the rise in floor level wages/reservation income of farmers and decline in rural-urban distress migration (which is the source of cheap labour in urban factories) were not very good news to the capitalists (and the governmental authorities who were also essentially following the neoliberal path).

The second NDA government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the very beginning tried to paralyse this scheme and called it a 'monumental failure'.

Notwithstanding this, as NREGA was backed by law (or, as it is a right-based scheme), the government could not fully stop the programme. Later on, the NDA government also found it as a useful programme to profile their pro-poor attitude and gradually owned it.

Like India, other South Asian countries, particularly Nepal and Bangladesh, have been implementing employment guarantee schemes. Nepal introduced the Karnali Employment Programme (KEP) in 2006. It covers only five districts of the most backward zone of the country, i.e. Karnali. The programme is tax-financed as is the case with MGNREGA. Like MGNREGA, this programme also promises to give 100 days' unskilled manual work at a fixed rate. It is not a right-based scheme. It has remained a supply-driven scheme, and by 2014 the average workdays in a year were only 18. International agencies have collaborated with the Nepal Government for a universal employment guarantee scheme like MGNREGA and a bill in this regard was

prepared by the Nepal Planning Commission in 2012. It is yet to be ratified by the Nepal Parliament (Mok & Kuhner, 2018)

Bangladesh has also implemented a series of employment guarantee policies, such the Hundred-day Employment Generation Program (EGP) launched in 2008. This was renamed as the Employment Generation for the Hardcore Poor (EGHP) in 2009 and again modified to Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP) in 2010. This has been the largest social safety net in the country and the budgetary allocations have also increased substantively. However, unlike MGNREGA, it is not a statutory and right-based programme, as it does not have a provision of unemployment allowance. Despite these limitations, studies show that the direct cash transfer benefit scheme of EGPP helped in increasing income, quality food consumption and reducing loan liabilities (Cho & Ruthbah, 2018).

4.4.2 Microcredit and Financial Inclusion

Microcredit emerged as one of the defining tools of alleviation of poverty under neoliberalism. The idea behind microcredit/finance is 'self-help'. It releases the state from its responsibility of eliminating the structural roots of poverty and inequality. The idea of microfinance/microcredit as a tool of poverty reduction comes from initiatives undertaken by Muhammed Yunus in the 1980s who established the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Yunus discovered that poverty is primarily due to the poor peoples' failure to enter the business market as they have no access to financial services from formal institutions. He added the lack of entrepreneurial spirit as another core factor behind poverty (Davutoğlu, 2013). With this discovery, he started the Grameen Bank with microfinance facility and later announced that it had been a grand success in Bangladesh towards reducing poverty.²³ In the 1990s, his bank became a global model that gradually had turned into a commercial revolution and an 'unsubsidised for-profit business'. Due to its success, the bank was accepted by the World Bank as a model and became popular in most of the poverty-stricken countries throughout the world including in India. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, microcredit became a celebrated and sensational credit mechanism with 2005 being declared as 'the year of microcredit' (Davutoğlu, 2013).

It is relevant to point it out here that the United Nations declared the year 1996 as the International

²³Grameen Bank was launched in the village of Jobra in 1976 with a \$27 loan. Over a period of time it has emerged as one of the impressive antipoverty programs. Grameen Bank has by now almost 2,000 branches. The staff of the bank is around 11,000. Sources reveal that the Bank has loaned \$3.9 billion. The recovery rate has been almost 98%. What has been remarkable is that about 90% of its loans are financed from its own funds, using the savings of depositors. The depositors are also borrowers. Since 1998, Grameen Bank has not used any donor funds in its loan programs. (Economist's abstract on Banker to the Poor)

Year of Eradication of Poverty and 1997-2006 as the first International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. In 1997, the World Microcredit Summit was held at Washington D C. The summit announced that 'a global target of supporting 100 million of the world's poorest families, especially women, with microcredit for self-employment and other financial and business services by the year 2005' (Nair, 2001). The principles of microfinance conform to the neoliberal model of 'growth with equity'. A series of country reports produced by the World Bank as well as UN agencies claim that microfinance and microcredit have had a significant impact on poverty reduction in South Asian countries.

Other South Asian countries also have prioritised microcredit/finance as important tools of poverty alleviation. In Pakistan, as reported by the Pakistan

Microcredit Network (PMN), an industry group of microfinance providers, 'the total number of active micro loan borrowers topped 4 million; the outstanding amount of microloans touched Rs 105 billion; micro savings stood at Rs 68 billion and the number of micro insurance policy holders exceeded 5.5 million' at end of March 2016. However, with a potential market of 20.5 million borrowers, the penetration stood at a meagre 19.5 per cent (Aazim, 2016). Cumbersome procedures, high interest rates and inferior quality of service have been the concerns of the borrowers.

The World Bank has published several reports showing the impact of microcredit on poverty mitigation. However, critical studies by the bank also show that there is no evident link between the two. It has pointed out over-indebtedness as one of the challenges.

Box 4.5: Does Microfinance Still Hold Promise for Reaching the Poor?

The World Bank was one of the institutions which propagated and promoted the concept of microfinance/credit as one of the important institutions towards eradicating poverty and empowering the poor. However, the bank, of late, expressed its doubts over the ability of the microfinance/credit to uproot poverty.

In a report, the Banks writes:

'Nearly two decades ago, when the concept of microfinance as a poverty reduction tool was in its infancy, there was hope that microcredit would transform economic and social structures. With its focus on reaching the previously unbanked, microcredit was expected to bring about change at the household level, a market in developing countries that traditional financial institutions had failed to reach.

Fifteen years on, the microfinance industry is estimated at \$60-100 billion, with 200 million clients, but the results have been mixed. Critics cite modest benefits associated with microcredit, over-indebtedness, and a trend toward commercialization that is less focused on serving the poor.'

Source: World Bank. (2015/March 30). Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/03/30/does-microfinance-still-hold-promise-for-reaching-the-poor>.

4.4.3 Insurance Schemes

The governments across South Asia have indulged in introducing and implementing insurance schemes to mitigate poverty-induced catastrophes. The Government of India is taking a lead in this regard. An example of a recent undertaking of this kind is the Ayushman Bharat, the world's biggest health insurance scheme, launched in 2018. Under the scheme, over 10.47 crore poor and vulnerable families will be entitled to get the benefits. Renamed as PM Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), it offers an insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh per family. About 50 crore citizens stand to benefit from the scheme. 'PM-JAY envisions to help mitigate catastrophic expenditure on medical treatment which pushes nearly 6 crore Indians into poverty each year.'²⁴ India, which aims to be a five trillion US dollar economy by 2024, has 50 crore marginal population out of total 130 crore who will be benefited from the scheme. Some

of the eligibility criteria of the scheme for the rural areas are: families living in only one room with kutchha walls and kutchha roof; female-headed family with no adult male member in the 16-59 age group; families having at least one disabled member and no able-bodied adult member; SC/ST households; landless households deriving a major part of their income from manual casual labour; destitute and those surviving on alms; manual scavenger families; tribal groups; and legally-released bonded labourers (Aazim, 2016).

Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana and Atal Pension Yojana etc. are some of such schemes run with the mode of insurance and financial inclusion. In every budget the government allocates funds for these schemes and they become the talking points of the success stories of the incumbent governments. For example, Ayushman Bharat is implemented in

²⁴<https://pmjay.gov.in/about-pmjay>

the backdrop of the collapse of public healthcare institutions, and the insurance benefits flow to the private hospitals, rather than public healthcare institutions. In other words, the private health establishments draw huge profits out of these schemes.

Likewise, the Government of Sri Lanka has implemented many such insurance policies for various categories of people, working in the formal and informal as well as public and private domains. Important among these policies and programmes are: Public Servants Pension Scheme (PSPS); Widows, Widowers and Orphans Pension Scheme; Public Servants Provident Fund and Aghara Medical Insurance. These are meant for public institution employees. For the private sector worker too, there are schemes like the Employee's Provident Fund (EPF) and Employee's Trust Fund (ETF) etc. (Tilakratna & Jayawardana, 2015). In Sri Lanka, almost 60 per cent of those employed are in the informal sector. However, there are only a handful of social security programmes for them. They do not have access to maternity and medical benefits and retirement benefits like EPF/ETF and pensions (Tilakratna & Jayawardana, 2015).

Pakistan, too, has launched several social insurance schemes like the Employees Old-Age Benefits (EOBI), Worker Profit Participation Fund, Workers Welfare Fund, compensation to those affected by terrorism etc. In March 2019, the country launched an ambitious social security and poverty alleviation programme called Ehsaas (compassion). This programme is proposed to be included in the Constitution of the country by amending the relevant provisions, which will make the state constitutionally obliged to undertake the responsibility of food, shelter, clothing, education and health of the common masses.

Box 4.6. Ehsaas – The Biggest Poverty Alleviation Programme Launched by Pakistan

In October 2019, Pakistan inaugurated the country's largest poverty alleviation scheme to combat hunger by providing food to the poor. This is an initiative on the part of the Prime Minister Imran Khan 'as part of his ambitious plan to build a Madina-like welfare state'.

The Scheme is launched in association with the Saylani Trust, one of the country's biggest welfare organisations. The prime minister declared: 'We will try that no one remains hungry because states do not flourish if their people sleep on empty stomachs...'

Source: Business Standard. (2019/7 October). Available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/pak-launches-biggest-poverty-alleviation-programme-to-emulate-madina-like-welfare-state-119100701051_1.html.

These schemes, too, are target-oriented and are aimed at creating beneficiary regimes. It helps in bringing legitimacy of the state but does not address the structural roots either of poverty or inequality.

4.4.4 Cash and In-Kind Assistance for Poor

Cash transfer has emerged as one of the significant modus operandi of the neoliberal social assistance programmes. This aims to create direct beneficiaries. Almost all third world countries have been implementing these schemes and policies, with the Government of India taking a lead. The schemes originally started in the countries of Latin America. These schemes also represented a change in basic assumptions of the economy—from the supply-side approach to that of a demand-driven approach. The UNDP (2009) pointed out that in the context of Latin America, these policies emerged primarily to address extreme poverty emanating from the macroeconomic crisis of the 1990s. The objective laid down was to help in the formation of human capital. Under these schemes, cash benefits are offered to attend schools and health clinics as well as to join in the immunisation drives. 'These programmes represent a shift in government's approach of focusing on the supply-side to a demand driven approach. The evidence across countries indicates that the schemes provide incentives to households to adjust their behaviour towards nationally accepted social goals in situations where supply constraints are not serious' (UNDP, 2009).

Similar schemes available in India include Dhanalakshmi, 2008; Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), 2005; Balika Samridhi Yojana, 1997; the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary-Level under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), 2003; the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay Scheme, 2004; the Ladli scheme of the Delhi government launched in 2008; the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, 2019; so on. These schemes have been very populist and are designed to derive electoral benefits. For example, the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, which was announced in the 2019-20 interim budget, proposed to give Rs 6,000 to farmers in a year in three instalments and targeted 12 crore small and marginal farmers holding cultivable land up to two hectares. The first instalment of Rs 2,000 was transferred to one crore farmers in February 2019, just ahead of the general elections (PTI, 2019). Various provincial governments have also launched many such schemes. For example, the Telangana government launched the Rythu Bandhu scheme that offers Rs 10,000 per acre a year to all farmers, excluding tenant farmers. Likewise, the Odisha government launched the Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme under which it offers direct benefit cash transfer of Rs 25,000 for a farm family over five seasons to small and marginal farmers (The Economic Times, 2019).

Sri Lanka, too, has been implementing many such schemes. Important among them are: Samurdhi/Divi Neguma Subsidy Programme, 2015; programmes under the National Secretariat for Elders (NSE) of the Ministry of Social Services (MSS) for the people above 70 years of age; Schemes under the National Secretariat for Persons with Disability (NSPD); disaster relief programmes; Vulnerable Group Feeding programme; Divi Neguma Livelihood Development Programme, 2014; etc. All these programmes earmark substantive fund which is directly transferred to the beneficiaries (Tilakratna & Jayawardana, 2015).

Meanwhile in Pakistan, poverty alleviation through social protection schemes has also attained momentum in the past decade. Accordingly, since 2008, the country, apart from increasing the fiscal outlays on social protection, has created a national poverty registry (Sayed, 2015). For example, Benazir Income Support Programme (BSIP), a targeted scheme, allocated PKR 97.8 billion to cover 5.25 million beneficiaries for the fiscal year 2013-14; Prime Minister's Fee Reimbursement for Poor in Less Developed Areas, with an allocation of PKR 1.2 billion for a targeted beneficiary of 30,000 in 2013-14; Pakistan Baitul-Mal, with an allocation of PKR 2 billion targeting 1,117,24911 beneficiaries (Sayed, 2015).

Bangladesh has been implementing both unconditional cash transfers and conditional cash transfers programmes to ensure social protection. Important among those are: (a) Old-age allowance programme for the poor and vulnerable elderly (62 years and older for women; 65 years and older for men) which pays BDT 500 (\$6) per month to over 4 million beneficiaries across the country; (b) Allowances for the widow, destitute and deserted women, a programme that provides BDT 500 (\$6) per month to over 1.4 million beneficiaries throughout the country; (c) Allowances for the financially insolvent disabled, which started in 2006 with 100,000 beneficiaries and has now expanded to 1 million beneficiaries who receive a monthly allowance of BDT 700 (\$8.5) (World Bank, 2019).

4.4.5 Food Security

India launched the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013 with an ambitious aim to address poverty and malnutrition across the country. The Act was the culmination of struggles both in the court and on the streets. In 2001, the Supreme Court of India, while hearing a petition filed by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), laid down that the right to food is a part and parcel of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution that guarantees the right to life and liberty. There were petitions, struggles and negotiations which finally led to the enactment of the NFSA, and the Act came into effect from 10 September 2013. The Act guarantees access to

adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to two-thirds of the Indian population. It provides for (a) for a free meal a day (either freshly cooked or ready to eat) for all children in the age group of 6 months to 6 years; and (b) pregnant and nursing women through Anganwadi centres (AWCSs) run by ICDS (Oxfam India, 2016). 'Under the Act, 67 per cent of India's population (75 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of the urban population) are entitled to food grains at highly subsidised rates of Rs3, Rs2 and Re1 per kg of wheat, rice and millets respectively through the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)' (Oxfam India, 2016).

While this Act has been lauded all across the world for its coverage and benefits; however, there have been attempts on the part of the government to dilute its provisions. For example, there have been suggestions to reduce the coverage to around 40 per cent of the population as well as to replace the Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanism, which is the backbone of the PDS, with direct cash transfers. Clearly, the intent seems to be to whittle down the NFSA completely' (Oxfam India, 2016).

Box 4.7: Joseph Stiglitz Lauds India for Recognising Right to Food as a Basic Human Right

Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz praised India for recognising the right to food as a basic human right, stating that the country was leading the way for the rest of the world. Addressing the 46th convocation of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) on 12 January 2012, he also alluded to the National Food Security Act of 2013 (which was yet to be passed by the Indian Parliament at the time) as 'the world's largest social protection programme against hunger'. He pointed out that poverty-stricken peoples' inability to access food due to a lack of income is the root of hunger not the absolute shortage of grain itself. Professor Stiglitz also mentioned that one out of seven Americans were on food stamps and nearly the same number of people still faced food insecurity, ruefully pointing out that while basic economic rights, like the right to food, was a raging debate in India, it was completely absent in American discourse.

Source: Dutta, A (2012/January 13). The Hindu. Available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-leads-the-world-in-recognising-the-right-to-food-says-joseph-stiglitz/article2796474.ece>.

Long before India adopted the NFSA in 2013, Bangladesh introduced the National Food Policy in 2006. It was framed in line with the objectives laid down by the World Food Summit, 1996. Three important objectives were outlined in the policy document: '(a) adequate and stable supply of safe and nutritious food, b) increased purchasing power and access to food of the people and (c) adequate nutrition for all individuals, especially women and children' (GPRB, 2006). The government also introduced the National Nutrition Policy (NNP) in 2015 intending to improve the nutritional status of Bangladeshis, which the country endeavours to achieve by ensuring the availability of adequate and safe food as well as the diversification of diets.

In 2018, just two days ahead of its five-year term, the PML-led government in Pakistan unveiled the National Food Security Policy. The government also called the policy the second most important policy after the defence policy. Pakistan has 37.26 million malnourished populations. The policy primarily aims to promote sustainable food production at an average growth rate of four per cent per annum. To achieve this, the policy also pledged to make agriculture more productive, competitive and climate-friendly (Ali, 2018). The policy objectives have remained unimplemented so far.

Box 4.8: The Pervasive Dangers Food Shortages and Food Insecurity

Food shortages and food insecurity are a looming danger in Pakistan, amid the never-ending political chaos, rising inflation, stark socio-economic inequalities, mis-governance and natural disasters. With almost 24 per cent of the country's population deemed undernourished, those who are considered as surviving on less than a dollar a day, a meal is just a naan or chapatti with a cup of tea or maybe an onion or some chillies. The pinch is even felt by the middle-class, and homemakers are forced to plan nutritious diets on severely constrained budgets. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation data, 37.5 million Pakistanis do not get adequately nourishing food that results in critical protein deficiencies as well as deficiencies of vital minerals, such as iron and iodine. It is no brainer that poverty is pointed out as the main culprit, which has a cascading effect on food consumption and nutritional choices of the common people. Next in line is the rising food prices that affects the poorest the most.

Source: Dawn. (2013). Food for all, January 26. Available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/781478>.

4.4.6 Housing Schemes

Of late, housing for the urban poor and the developments of the slums have been given more importance by the Government of India. In 2015, the Government of India launched the scheme Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), with the basic objective of providing low-cost housing for the poor in urban areas. The scheme essentially is the new incarnation of the Rajiv Awas Yojana launched by the previous UPA government in 2009. In 2005, the UPA government had also launched two programmes under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), namely the Basic Services to Urban Poor (BSUP) and the Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme (IHSDP). BSUP was an ambitious programme which 'focused on providing services like water supply, toilets, wastewater drainage, solid waste

management, power, roads, transport and access to legal and affordable housing for urban poor. IHSDP, on the other hand, focused on creating a more inclusive approach to urban planning and city management. The objective was to ensure land was available to the poor at affordable prices through the reservation of land for Economically Weaker Section housing and ensuring facilities for urban infrastructure, and transport services on the fringes of the cities, can provide alternatives that would restrict the formation of new slums. Under BSUP and IHSDP component housing units are provided to urban poor. As per GOI guidelines, the beneficiary contribution could be around 12% of project cost for general category and 10% for urban poor belonging to Special Category' (Mohammed, 2017). A critical analysis shows that both the allocation of the fund as well as the actual implementation of the projects have been incredibly low.

Box 4.9: A Colossal Demand and Supply Gap in Housing Market

Pakistan is seeing an acute demand and supply gap in its urban housing market, with the demand reaching 350,000 units a year against a formal supply of 150,000 units annually. The government is trying to solve the unmet demand by creating informal settlements—letting housing seekers occupy government land (katchiabadis or squatter settlements) and by distributing agricultural land (through a system called informal subdivision of agricultural land or ISAL) on the fringe of the urban settlements.

Meanwhile, there is the issue of severely insufficient credit facilities which is blamed at a housing credit system that direly needs an overhaul. The creation of readily available credit for the purchase of land for individuals as well as small cooperatives is an element that can have a positive outcome in meeting the housing demand. The country has a backlog of 8.5 million units that are growing at the rate of 200,000 units a year—a monumental chasm that would need 100 billion rupees every year for the next one decade to bridge. In sharp contrast, the 2017-18 budget of Pakistan allocated a meagre 2.329 billion rupees for housing.

Source: Dawn. (2018/19, August). Available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1427893>.

Bangladesh has also been implementing schemes for the low-income community. In 2016, the World Bank reported that the country has the highest percentage of urban slum dwellers which stood at 62 per cent- the highest in Asia. The country signed two agreements with the World Bank totalling \$200 million in 2016. Out of this, \$150 million was meant for mitigating health sector challenges, which include programmes like immunisation and institutional deliveries. The remaining \$50 million was meant for low-income community housing support project. It was estimated that 'around 40,000 low-income urban residents will have access to housing loans, while another 120,000 people will benefit from the improved roads and drainage' (World Bank, 2016). Reports suggest that the Bangladesh government has been progressing towards improving the urban low-cost housing for the poor. The country stipulates housing as a right and a requirement towards transformative social change. The government adopted the National Housing Policy, 2017 that guarantees housing for every citizen. However, challenges are mounting. The Daily Star reported that 'currently, seven out of 10 households in Bangladesh dwell in conditions that are

not permanent. In Dhaka alone, there are over 4,000 informal settlements, or slums, home to 3.5 million people—who form a majority of the urban workforce in the country. Evidently, affordable urban housing is rapidly becoming a primary issue in Bangladesh' (2017).

4.4.7 Climate Change and Adaptability Schemes

In 2009, Afghanistan completed its National Adaptation Programme of Action for Climate Change (NAPA) in order to "identify priority activities that respond to their urgent and immediate needs with regard to adaptation to climate change - those needs for which further delay could cause increased vulnerability or lead to increased costs at a later stage." Afghanistan conducted its NAPA as a joint exercise with the National Capacity Needs Self-assessment for Global Environmental Management (NCSA), which is itself a mechanism for realising a comprehensive assessment of a country's capacity and capacity needs, for the fulfilment of the Rio Conventions. The NAPA/NCSA process identified the country's most vulnerable areas to climate change: agriculture, biodiversity and ecosystems, energy, forests and rangelands, natural disasters and water. It further identified Afghanistan's key priority areas for climate change: i) improved water management and usage efficiency; and ii) community-based watershed management. The NAPA/NCSA also identified the country's key challenges for addressing climate change, including a lack of expertise within relevant government institutions as a result of low levels of education, poor financing, and the fact that most government institutions are relatively nascent (Parsa, 2019).

NEPA is currently leading the development of a national Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan for Afghanistan (ACCSAP), with the following aims: i) integrate and mainstream climate change into the national development framework; ii) support the creation of a national framework for action on climate change adaptation; iii) identify low emission development strategies; iv) improve coordination and partnerships between government institutions, civil society, the international donor community, and the private sector; and v) increase availability and access to additional financial resources for effectively addressing climate change. The ACCSAP also identifies policy initiatives to address climate change adaptation in the vulnerable sectors and areas of agriculture, food security, water, biodiversity, natural disasters, health and infrastructure (Parsa, 2019). Gender equality and women's empowerment have also been recognised as important areas for the overall development and change; hence, the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) was approved and its implementation has started with the aim of establishing

gender equality (i.e. eliminating discrimination, building women's human capital and promoting their participation and leadership) (The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008).

As mandated by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change for the least developed countries (LDCs), Bangladesh submitted its National Adaption Programme of Action (NAPA) in 2005. Following up, the Climate Change Unit of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) brought out the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) in 2008, which was revised in 2009. The NAPA was also updated in 2009. The government set up a Climate Change Trust Fund (CCTF) in 2009, which has approved 43 government projects with USD 70 million allocations, besides 32 NGO projects with USD 3.5 million allocation. Besides, Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF) has been put in place with development partners pledging of USD 113.5 million (Martin et al., 2013).

India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), 2008 is ambitious by nature. The document, as declared by the Government of India attempts to address the issue of climate change from the perspective of inclusive development. A few of the principles highlighted by the action plan are: '(i) protecting the poor and vulnerable sections of society through an inclusive and sustainable development strategy, sensitive to climate change; (ii) achieving national growth through ecological sustainability; (iii) devising efficient and cost-effective strategies for end-use Demand Side Management; (iv) deploying appropriate technologies

for both adaptation and mitigation of greenhouse gases emissions; (v) engineering new and innovative forms of market, regulatory and voluntary mechanisms to promote sustainable development; (vi) effecting implementation of programmes by including civil society and local government institutions and through public-private partnership; and (vii) welcoming international cooperation for research, development, sharing and transfer of technologies' (PreventionWeb, 2008). The former Vice President of Maldives Dr Mohammed Waheed Hassan said that the Maldives was one of the most vulnerable countries on the earth to the threat of climate change. The country has no option but to adapt to climate change. Therefore, the country 'stands at the frontline of the climate change battle.' In 2010, the Government of Maldives signed a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding with the European Union (EU) and the World Bank Group to establish a new 'Trust Fund designed to build resilience to climate change in the Maldives.' Towards activating the Trust, the EU has contributed \$8.8 million (approximately EUR 6.5 million). The World Bank was entrusted to administer the trust for the initial years (World Bank, 2010). However, the country has been changing its climate change policies from time to time. For example, in 2008, the former President Mohamed Nasheed declared that 'he was seeking to buy a new homeland to save his people from being inundated by rising sea levels'. By 2017, the focus shifted from climate adaptability to development and tourism. The plan was to relocate the people from small islands to the larger ones and convert the small ones to resorts. There have also been rumours in circulation that the small islands may even be sold out (The Guardian, 2017).

Box 4.10: Bangladesh Acutely Feels the Heat of Climate Change

Bangladesh is literally feeling the heat of global warming-induced climate change, as it is being devastated by tropical storms, flooding and other natural disasters, leading to new patterns of displacement that are driving rapid, chaotic urbanisation. A U.S. Government Accountability Office report alleges that the State Department and other foreign aid agencies are doing little to mitigate climate-driven migration in developing nations and emphasises that the densely populated, riverine South Asian nation is particularly at risk to the threat of erratic climatic forces. The country is keenly aware of the situation, but its efforts are hardly commensurate to the pace and scale of the consequential displacement and urbanisation. In summary, capital city Dhaka presents a gloomy picture for refuge cities worldwide, which are estimated to see the migration of as many as 200 million people by 2050.

Source: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/01/climate-change-drives-migration-crisis-in-bangladesh-from-dhaka-sundabans/>.

4.5. Whatever Happened to Inequality

The discussion in this chapter reveals that the governments in the South Asian region have been pursuing several policies and schemes to address and mitigate poverty. Those have been pursued within the neoliberal framework. However, the issue of inequality does not feature as a core concern in the neoliberal policy discourses. Inequality has indeed been a driving force and fallout of the neoliberal policies. With appropriation and transfer of common resources to the corporate and the opening up of the public services and utilities to the private for-profit institutions, the gap between the rich and the poor has increased at an astonishing rate. South Asia Inequality Report, 2019 is a testimony to it. Oxfam Inequality Report, 2019 provides the alarming inequality trends in the largest South Asian economy, i.e. India.

Box 4.11: The Rapidly Growing Chasm Between the Super-Rich and the Poor

1. India boasts 119 billionaires, the number of whom rose from just 9 in 2000 to 101 in a mere 17 years. From 2018 to 2022, the country is projected to produce as many as 70 new millionaires every day.
2. Awash with billionaires, India's top 10% super-rich accounts for 77% of the total national wealth. The richest 1% garnered 73% of the wealth generated in 2017, while 67 million Indians who comprise the poorest half of the population saw only a 1% increase in their wealth.
3. Over a decade, the Indian billionaires' fortunes increased by almost 10 times. Their total wealth is higher than India's entire budget of INR 24,422 billion for the fiscal year 2018-19.
4. While more millionaires are pulling themselves up to the billionaire status, 63 million ordinary Indians are pushed into poverty every year because of rising healthcare costs.
5. The amount that a top paid executive at a leading Indian garment company earns a year is equivalent to the amount a minimum wage worker in rural India would earn in 941 years.

Source: Oxfam International (2019). India: extreme inequality in numbers. Available at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/india-extreme-inequality-numbers>.

4.6. Conclusion

Have the poverty eradication policies contributed towards poverty alleviation? The report cards presented by both government and non-government agencies show that most of the countries in South Asia have succeeded in reducing poverty to an extent. However, the statistics on poverty depends on the parameters used to estimate poverty. In most cases, poverty has been measured with certain standards which do not consider the overall growth in wealth, services and technology so on and how those have been distributed. In other words, the measurement of poverty has been quite narrow, and it is done without measuring the aspirations out of the overall growth. It also does not consider multiple deprivations at various levels. Poverty has been measured mostly from the vantage point of mere subsistence. Therefore, poverty measured through the multidimensional poverty index (MPI) and inequality shows appalling figures. It is poverty that forces people to move out both within the country and beyond. South Asia, therefore, continues to witness huge migration both internal and external.

The poverty alleviation programmes have aimed at mitigating the immediate needs, and has ignored the structural roots of poverty and inequality. Articulated and implemented within the overall framework of neoliberalism, the policies and schemes on poverty also aim at the immediate political gains and endeavour to create a state of chronic dependence of the citizens on the state. The transfer of common and community resources to the corporate and the privatisation of the core service sectors have intensified poverty across the states in region. The policies on climate change have been both fragmented and inadequate. The growing unrest in the rural site, as is evident from the farmers' movements in India, in particular, is the testimony to the growing intensity of the rural crises. To overcome the crises the region urgently needs a radical transformation in the policy priorities. Too much focus on poverty alleviation with deliberate ignorance of multi-layered inequalities will not help the region to come out of the rural crises.

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CHAPTER

5

State Responses to Migration, Emigration and Refugees

State Responses to Migration, Emigration and Refugees

Akhil Ranjan Dutta

5.1. Introduction: The Region without a Legal Framework

The issue of migrants, emigrants and refugees has reached a serious intensity in South Asia both in terms of volumes and challenges. The international community, particularly the International Labour Organization (ILO), has laid down protocols and conventions on the refugees and the immigrant/migrant population. However, the national governments in general and the governments of South Asia in particular, are yet to ratify and formulate right policies in conformity with those protocols and conventions. Ghosh (2016) has mentioned that the region of South Asia has 'experienced hosting millions of migrants and refugees that too without a proper legal framework in place' (p. 177). The question is how the region has handled such a huge magnitude of migrants/emigrants and refugees? Has it been addressed through national, bilateral or regional efforts? Ghosh (2016) has pointed out that nothing substantive has happened either at the regional front or the bilateral front in this regard. It is through the individual state's efforts that the issues, particularly the issue of refugees, have been handled. However, efforts like relief have been made, rather than a permanent solution under the international protocols and covenants.

5.2. Nature of the State Policies

In most of the countries in South Asia, internal migration surpasses the external migrants. However, the primary focus of the international covenants, as well as the national policies, has been on external migrants and refugees. The distress-induced and unregistered internal migrants like inter-district and inter-province migrants are huge. The insecurity and challenges of those migrants have been attempted to be solved through a series of social security/protection policy initiatives as we have discussed in the preceding chapter. Government of India, for example, enacted both the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act of 1970 and the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act of 1979 to deal with the issues concerning internal migrants. Some other governments, too, for example, Bangladesh, undertook initiatives such as

the establishment of the Migrant Welfare Bank (2011), Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET, 1976), and the enactment of the Wage Earners' Welfare Board Act, 2018; Sri Lanka adopted the National Labour Policy, 2008; and Pakistan also enacted the National Labour Policy 2010. Besides these, social security programmes, including employment generating schemes like the MGNREGA in case of India or the National Adaptation Policy in case of Afghanistan, are also aimed at addressing the issues concerning the internal migrants. These policies are designed to prevent migration. There are serious concerns about a lack of access to the benefits of those policies to the migrants. For example, migrants are denied subsidised and free facilities (such as, PDS, cooking gas) and health insurance schemes and/or welfare programmes in case of India. At many instances, the migrants are also denied the right of participation in the democratic process by denying them voter cards, licences and other basic documents (bank accounts, Aadhaar cards and so on). In other words, social security or poverty alleviation policies themselves are very discretionary and exclusionary.

Various country reports of SAAPE, 2019 have revealed the unique kind of problems faced both by the internal and the external/international migrants in the respective countries. Both Sri Lanka and Nepal reports have raised the issue of agencies involved in governing/ conducting the external migrants like ensuring the permits/visas and destinations. Nepal has reported the death of one migrant every day in Malaysia due to a lack of social security measures. Those are extremely critical issues as far as distress-induced international migrants are concerned. Countries have formulated emigration laws to govern the international migrants arriving at their soils. However, all those have serious flaws. A recent example is the draft emigration policy of India, 2019, which attempts to rectify the shortcomings of the 1983 emigration law, is itself marked by serious drawbacks.

Both the objectives and procedures registering citizenship, as witnessed in India today through the instrument of the National Registry of Citizens (NRC), may also be extremely dangerous and detrimental to the rights of the migrants/immigrants. The neoliberal development processes have been accompanied by

growing obsessive tendencies around ethnicities and castes. These are getting intensified due to layers of deprivations and marginalisation of communities under the growth obsessive and resource extractive neoliberal policies. For example, in India's North East, there have been continued demands for special protection for indigenous communities, reserving the rights over land for those communities as well as the introduction of inner line permit system. All these have created new threats to the migrants, particularly the distress-induced ones.

Box 5.1: When the State Calls the Migrants “the Termites”

During 2019 election campaigns in India, the president of the ruling BJP, Mr. Amit Shah, compared the illegal migrants with the termites. He said: “Illegal immigrants are like termites. They are eating the grain that should go to the poor, they are taking our jobs.”

Both the government and the leaders of the Sangha Parivar declared it openly that by enacting a nationwide NRC, they will ensure that no Hindu is ever deported from the country. At a political rally in Kolkata on 1 October, Amit Shah said, “I want to assure all Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist and Christian refugees that you will not be forced to leave India by the Centre. Don't believe rumours. Before NRC, we will bring the Citizenship Amendment Bill, which will ensure these people get Indian citizenship.”

Source: The Wire. (2019/4 October). Available at <https://thewire.in/politics/amit-shahs-nrc-plan-decoded-communal-division-and-a-big-lie-too>.

5.3. International Framework

The international normative framework on migrants includes instruments pertaining to the human rights of all migrants, the rights of migrant workers and the protection of refugees, as well as instruments designed to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking. These instruments have been ratified in varying degrees by the member states of the United Nations. As of September 2017, instruments designed to protect refugees or to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking had been ratified by more than three-quarters of the member states, whereas instruments protecting the rights of migrant workers had been ratified by at most one-quarter of the member states (UN-DESA, 2017).

The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees are the central elements in the international regime of refugee protection. The

ILO has three legally-binding instruments that are directly relevant for the protection of migrant workers: the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97); the Convention concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions), 1975 (No. 143); and the Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers, 2011 (No. 189). The 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children took effect in 2003 and 171 United Nations Member States had ratified it as of September 2017. The protocol defines human trafficking as the acquisition of people by improper means, such as force, fraud or deception, to exploit them (UN-DESA, 2017).

In 1990, the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CMW) not only reiterated the core principles of the human rights treaties but also went a notch further, for example, in defining discrimination more broadly, in providing stronger safeguards against collective and arbitrary expulsion and in ensuring the right of regular migrants to vote and be elected. However, there are only 41 signatories to date, of which only five are net immigration countries and none belong to the very high-HDI category (UN-DESA, 2017). Therefore, we can clearly get a perception of the Western nations and organisations towards migration from the many conventions and recommendations they have adopted to protect the rights of the international migrant workers.

In South Asia, except for Afghanistan, no other country has signed the international refugee convention of 1951 and 1967 and some other relevant international covenants (Ghosh, 2016, p. 214). However, several countries in the region have evolved their own mechanisms of dealing with the migrants, refugees and stateless persons—who are at many instances not distinguishable—through various ways. Most of these attempts have achieved only limited success primarily due to the absence of legal refugee regimes in the region as well as growing obsessive politics under the neoliberal regimes.

5.4. Global Compact on Migration

The date of 13 July 2018 has been a historic day for the entire humanity. On that day, the UN member states finalised the text for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The text is based on principles, values and commitments as enshrined in the human rights declarations and covenants adopted by the United Nations. The compact is overly ambitious and is premised on cooperation and comity of nations towards ensuring the rights and dignity of all migrants at all levels. It is, of course, a legally non-binding

document, and has 23 goals. The compact is 'the first-ever UN global agreement on a common approach to international migration in all its dimensions. The global compact is non-legally binding. It is grounded in values of state sovereignty, responsibility-sharing, non-discrimination, and human rights, and recognizes that a cooperative approach is needed to optimize the overall benefits of migration while addressing its risks and challenges for individuals and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination' (UN, 2018).

Box 5.2: Bangladesh PM Played a Pioneering Role Towards the UN Adopting the Global Compact on Migration

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, proposed for a global compact on migration at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2016. The adoption of the compact by the UN in 2018 has been celebrated as a victory for the country by the government.

The proposed global compact being approved at the UN summit for the adoption in the Moroccan city of Marrakesh, endeavours to address the problems faced by the migrants across the world.

Source: Dhaka Tribune. (2018/ 11 December). Available at <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2018/12/11/pm-s-proposal-of-un-global-compact-on-migration-adopted>.

The compact 'aims to mitigate the adverse drivers and structural factors that hinder people from building and maintaining sustainable livelihoods in their countries of origin' as well as 'intends to reduce the risks and vulnerabilities migrants face at different stages of migration by respecting, protecting and fulfilling their human rights and providing them with care and assistance' (Dhaka Tribune, 2018).

Out of 193 countries, 164 adopted the Compact in December 2019 in Morocco. In the United Nations, where the compact was adopted as an official document, only 152 countries voted for it. The United States of America was the first country to withdraw from the negotiations, alleging that it violates the principle of national sovereignty. Many European countries faced internal resistance against signing the compact. These developments have made the implementation of the GCM uncertain.

India, along with other South Asian countries, has adopted the Global Compact on Migration. Bangladesh claims that the GCM is indeed an outcome of a proposal raised by the country's prime minister in the UN General Assembly in 2016. 'The proposal of Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina for a global compact on migration made at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2016 has been adopted' (Dhaka Tribune, 2018). Bangladesh has been highly active in hosting various international events concerning the compact and related issues. The country has also asserted that it has already taken initiative towards framing a 'draft national strategy on migration governance to address migration in all its forms and manifestations' (Dhaka Tribune, 2018). Pakistan called it a historic move. Sri Lanka viewed it as the beginning of the real work, and not the end. However, will the countries, which do not have proper emigration policies and have shown discriminatory approaches towards migrants and immigrants, truly implement the principles and objectives of the compact? Critics have expressed surprise over India signing the compact on many counts. First, the Government of India's approach to both refugees and illegal migrants has been rather unwelcoming. Second, the government has not signed any law related to migration and refugees, and it does not have an explicit immigration policy. The Government of India's approach to refugees has also been discriminatory in nature (Akhil, 2019). Similar observations can be made about the other countries of the region as well.

5.5. Regional Initiatives

At the regional level, the Colombo Process and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have been engaging in a consultative process to protect the interests of international and internal migrants. Countries have also undertaken several policy measures to deal with international migration on their own. Broadly, these comprise steps to reform the regulatory and institutional framework; tackling the recruitment process and the cost of international migration; measures to protect the conditions of work and the rights of migrant workers abroad, including bilateral agreements with destination countries; steps to ensure safe migration of women workers; active labour policy measures, including the promotion of awareness among potential migrants; labour market information systems, pre-departure training and skills promotion; promotion of formal financial intermediation; and steps to provide social security to migrant workers, their families and returnees. In the case of cross-border migration, irregular migration and trafficking are seen as important concerns, and countries have taken steps to check irregular/illegal migration, but no comprehensive policy has been formulated by South Asian countries to curb illegal and undocumented cross-border migration. There is an urgent need to recognise and regulate cross-border illegal or undocumented migration, but the close cultural, social, historical and economic ties between countries in this region should also be taken into consideration before

formulating any law. In comparison to international migration, there is a dearth of policies related to internal migration in South Asian countries. Most have a range of policies related to emigration, but none has a comprehensive policy related to internal migration. Each country has labour laws covering a range of issues, from freedom of collective bargaining and formation of unions to the provision of social security benefits (including maternity protection, occupational safety and health) to labourers working in different sectors, but other than in India, there is no specific law focusing exclusively on migrant labour. Besides, with the onslaught of neoliberal reforms, there have been exclusions of workers working in certain sectors, for example in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in Sri Lanka, from the existing protective measures of labour laws. Apart from governmental action, a large number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are active in the South Asian region and working in specific areas to protect the interests of migrants, and these provide an interface between migrants and policymakers (Srivastava & Pandey, 2017, pp. 8-19). What is relevant here is that these policies are evolving within the overall framework of neoliberal economics which is marked by 'accumulation' through 'dispossession'. Distress-induced migration is inherent to the neoliberal model of development. These are not aberrations. Therefore, despite having many social security policies and schemes, neither poverty nor inequality has decreased in the true sense.

5.6. Bilateral and National Efforts towards Refugees

The Constitution of India, for example, made provisions of accommodating the partition refugees till the commencement of the Constitution. The 1955 Citizenship Act elaborated it, and the first amendment to the Citizenship Act enacted in 1986 extended the cut-off date for granting citizenship to the immigrants from East Pakistan or present-day Bangladesh till 24 March 1971. Subsequent amendments to the Act gradually tightened the acquisition of citizenship by birth. The proposed amendment to the Citizenship Act, 2016 talks about granting citizenship to the refugees till 31 December 2014 on religious lines, i.e. to six non-Muslim categories of refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It has created enormous debates and dissents in India. On the other hand, the National Registry of Citizens (NRC) updated for the state of Assam, adopting 24 March 1971 as the cut-off date for granting citizenship has also provoked a lot of debates and controversies as it makes more than 1.5 million people stateless without any bilateral extradition treaty with the alleged origin country of the immigrants, i.e. Bangladesh. The position of the Indian state has been ambiguous as different ministries have spoken in different languages, creating fear psychosis

among those whose names have been excluded from the final list of NRC. The process of appeal through Foreigners' Tribunals will be both troublesome and expensive. The civil society, which demanded the NRC in unison, also got divided once the final list was published. Leading nationalist organisations such as All Assam Students' Union (AASU), a signatory to the Assam Accord, expressed its utter disappointment over the number of exclusions.

Box 5.3: Assam NRC Final List Made the Stakeholders Unhappy

The All Assam Students' Union (AASU), the signatory to the Assam Accord, was not happy with the exclusion figure in the final National Register of Citizens (NRC). The list was released on Saturday, 31 August 2019. The organisation said that it would appeal against it in the Supreme Court.

AASU complains that there were certain deficiencies in the updating process and therefore calls it 'an incomplete NRC'. The list, which leaves out 1.9 million applicants, contained a much smaller figure compared to what the government officials had been pronouncing from time to time. "We will appeal to the Supreme Court to remove all the faults and discrepancies in this NRC," AASU declared.

Source: India Today. (2019/31 August). Available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/assam-nrc-final-aasu-move-supreme-court-1593827-2019-08-31>.

The refugee problem has reached a serious proportion in the entire region of South Asia. The issue has both bilateral and multilateral implications. Whereas, the issue of Chakma refugees is more of a bilateral one between India and Bangladesh, the issue of Afghan, as well as Rohingya refugees, is more complex and multilateral in nature. Devoid of a legal framework, the governments in the region, except Afghanistan, have been struggling with the issue.

One of the sensitive issues between Bangladesh and India has been the Chakma refugees. The locals in Northeast India have protested against their presence in the region, and the Supreme Court intervention also has not paved the way for any substantive solution. The Chakmas, whose presence in two states of the region Northeast India, continues to evoke protests and resistance. Since the 1990s, it assumed political significance. A set of recommendations by a committee of the Rajya Sabha on a petition filed by the Chakmas of Mizoram in 1995 invited wrath of the local population. Through the petition the indigenous Chakmas of the state alleged that they have been

discriminated by the state government. Among other recommendations, the committee said that the Chakmas who came to Mizoram before 25 March 1971 might be granted citizenship as per the provisions of Clause 6A of the citizenship Act as amended in 1986. All the political parties, ethnic organisations and NGOs of the state strongly reacted to it and rejected the recommendations (Ghosh, 2016, pp. 107-08).

The scene in Arunachal Pradesh is not different. Organisations in the state strongly reject any move to invoke Clause 6-A of the Citizenship Act, calling it Assam specific. There have been problems in holding elections in the Chakma inhabited regions in the state. The successive state governments have refused to abide by any suggestion of the Union government to guarantee citizenship to them. The intervention of the Supreme Court about granting citizenship rights to the Chakmas and respecting their human rights have not helped the situation. Meanwhile, civil society outfits have started raising demands for evicting other refugees/immigrants from Tibet and Bangladesh from the state. Amidst all these challenges, the cooperation and good will between India and Bangladesh have been paving the way for repatriation of the refugees (Ghosh,

2016, pp. 107-08). Recently, the central government has proposed that the Chakmas and Hajongs will be granted citizenship without diluting the rights of the indigenous people (The Economic Times, 2017).

Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the post-Soviet intervention in Afghanistan have been a grave issue in South Asia. The country has hosted over three million refugees over the past four decades. The SAAPE country report of Pakistan (Ali Jan, 2019) reveals how the locals in Pakistan perceive these refugees. In the post-Soviet intervention period, the military regime of Zia in alliance with the US, gave refuge to millions of Afghans in the country. Over the years, they have come to be perceived as a threat to the country. Their dominance in the transport business and access to the market in central Asia have made them very influential. The demographic patterns of Peshawar and Quetta, as well as Karachi, have changed with the settlement of these refugees. It has also been alleged that the settlement of refugees resulted in the increase of drugs, weapons and religious seminaries in Pakistan, a by-product of the anti-Soviet jihad fuelled by the US and Saudi money in the region.

Box 5.4: The Tragedy of the Afghan Returnees: A Life Worse Than Refugees

Returning to their own country did not bring happiness to many Afghan refugees, and for many of them life as refugees in other countries was relatively better. The story of Halima Bibi, an Afghan refugee in Pakistan who returned to her own country, is a testimony to it.

Bibi, 60, is among more than 3.8 million refugee and undocumented Afghans who have returned to Afghanistan—by choice or by force—over the last five years. In 2016, after spending their entire lives as refugees, she and her three children were driven over the border on the back of a truck – one family among hundreds of thousands of Afghans pushed out of Pakistan that year in a refugee crackdown.

Today, she lives in a small brick house in Bela, a village hosting around 1,500 returnee families outside the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad. None of her three children have jobs, and Bibi worries about her health: she has not been able to find a clinic to treat complications from her leprosy.

“Life’s much more difficult here,” she said, sitting on the steps outside her concrete home, tears rolling down her wrinkled cheeks. “All of our extended family is in Pakistan and we struggle to survive.”

Story by Stefani Glinski, The New Humanitarian, Kabul and Jalalabad. Available at <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2019/08/01/Afghan-conflict-returnees-better-off-refugees>.

The Government of Pakistan in collaboration with UNHRC and Government of Afghanistan has been trying to bring a solution to the issue of Afghan refugees. These efforts have been made primarily under the framework of the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) (Ghosh, 2016, p. 205). Ghosh has pointed out that the strategy has three segments: (a) voluntary repatriation to the country of origin (b) integration in the host country and (c) resettlement in a third country. In collaboration with the UNHRC, Pakistan has been active in issuing birth certificates to Afghan refugees

and provided access to land, healthcare facilities and schooling too (Ghosh, 2016, pp. 205-06). The returnees, however, do not feel safe at home. Some of them said that being in refugee camps in Pakistan was safer than returning to Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan country report (Parsa, 2019) has detailed the third-party settlement of Afghan refugees. In this case too, Pakistan collaborated with the UNHRC, and international NGOs played an active role as well. Whereas all these appear to be a positive development, there have also been allegations that Pakistan

intelligence agency, ISI, uses the Afghan refugees for proxy wars in the neighbourhood.

The most challenging refugee issue in South Asia at the present is the Rohingya refugees. It has created a lot of humanitarian crises and political upheavals in the region. As the political atrocities in different incarnations continue to occur in Myanmar, the refugees from the country to the states of South Asia also continue to flow. Rohingyas belong to the Rakhine province of Myanmar which is next to Bangladesh, and they consider Bangladesh as a natural refuge whenever trouble brews up in their homeland. By 2009,

there were around 4 million Rohingyas in Bangladesh (Ghosh, 2016, p. 209). With the initiatives from the UNHRC, the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh have agreed to repatriate the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar. However, it has achieved only limited success. Many Rohingyas even refused to return due to the prevailing political situations in Myanmar (Ghosh, 2016, pp. 209-10).

By 2017, the Rohingya refugee crisis took a profoundly serious turn, with the growing ethnic violence in Rakhine province. BBC reported that nearly 7.0 lakh fled to Bangladesh risking death by sea or foot.

Box 5.5: 'Textbook Example of Ethnic Cleansing': BBC

In August 2017, Myanmar witnessed a deadly crackdown on Rohingya Muslims by Myanmar's army. It forced around 700,000 Rohingyas to flee to the neighbouring country Bangladesh by sea or foot even at the risk of their lives. The United Nations described it as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing". In 2020, the army refused to undertake any measure to protect these people from 'genocide' in the pretext that it was fighting only the Rohingya militants and has not targeted the civilians.

Source: BBC. (2020). Myanmar Rohingya: What you need to know about the crisis, 23 January. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>.

It was reported that by October 2017, Bangladesh had nearly 1million Rohingyas as against 0.48 million in the Rakhine province of Myanmar. Pakistan had 0.35 million and India had 40,000 Rohingyas. While international organisations have been collaborating with the Bangladesh government to help the Rohingyas in refugee camps in the country, the plight of the refugees continues to be very alarming. The UNHRC applauded the Bangladesh government and its people, saying the country 'has kept its borders open, offering safety and shelter to fleeing families.

We have been moved by the welcome and generosity shown by the local communities towards the refugees' (UNHRC, 2017). By September 2019, there seemed to be no solution at all to the crisis. The BBC reported that 'entire Muslim Rohingya villages in Myanmar have been demolished and replaced by police barracks, government buildings and refugee relocation camps' (BBC, 2019) The attempts for repatriation have failed as the refugees approved by Myanmar government refused to go back on the grounds of insecurity.

Box 5.6: Identity Documents for More Than Half a Million Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

In August 2019, the Government of Bangladesh and the UNHRC undertook a joint registration drive for more than 500,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. The first of its kind for many refugees, 'biometric, fraud-proof cards' have been issued through this registration to all verified refugees over the age of 12.

The objective behind this exercise was to 'ensure the accuracy of data on refugees in Bangladesh, giving national authorities and humanitarian partners a better understanding of the population and their needs. Accurate data will help agencies in their programme planning and be able to target assistance where it is needed most, particularly for people with specific needs, such as women and children taking care of their families and people with disabilities.'

The new registration cards will be a critical document 'in establishing and safeguarding the right of Rohingya refugees to return to their homes in Myanmar, if and when they decide the time is right for them to do so...'

Source: UNHRC. (2019/ 9 August). Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2019/8/5d4d24cf4/half-million-rohingya-refugees-receive-identity-documents-first-time.html>.

Bhutan is a small country in the region. It does not receive adequate attention about issues related to migration or refugees. The country, through its discriminatory citizenship policies, has forced to leave thousands of its citizens and to take refuge in different countries, particularly in Nepal. By the end of 1993, the total number of refugees who arrived in Nepal was about 84000. 'The UNHCR which fed the refugee population became increasingly impatient with the progress of Bhutan-Nepal Talks which had embroiled at the categorization of the refugees into four groups: (a) Bhutanese forcibly evicted, (b) Bhutanese who left the country, (c) Bhutanese with criminal records and (d) Non-Bhutanese people. This categorization which was proposed by Bhutan, and unwittingly agreed by Nepal, was installing any chances of refugee repatriation to Bhutan' (Dhakal, 2019).

5.7. National Policies on Emigrants, Returnees and Internal Migrants

The SAAPE country reports feeding to the present report (Parsa, 2019; Remesh, 2019; Bashyal, 2019; Arambepola, 2019) suggest that the national governments have not succeeded in enacting appropriate and adequate laws to govern internal and international migrants and also to rehabilitate the returnees. There are no consistent policies on internal migrants as those have been attempted to be covered under social protection policies. Little has been done for migrants moving out of the country, from whom the country of origin receives substantive remittances. For example, the respective governments have failed to mainstream the agencies for ensuring visa, safe destination and safe movement as well as safety in the destination. No substantial bilateral agreements are there to ensure the safety of the international migrants. There has been huge flow of migrants from South Asia to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The migrants have reported discrimination, violence and deaths too, in those countries. Nothing substantive initiatives have come from the national governments in South Asia in this regard.

5.7.1 National Policies on Emigrants and Returnees

South Asian countries have a huge percentage of international migrants and refugees dispersed across the world. The highest percentages of them are unskilled or semi-skilled workers and distress and

war-induced migrants. The World Bank reported in 2018 that the foreign remittances by migrant workers make up a significant part of the GDPs of the national economies of South Asian countries. In the case of Nepal, it is as high as 28 per cent.

Table 5.1: Remittances Received by South Asian Countries and Their Contribution to GDP, 2018

Country	Total Remittances	
(US billion dollar)	Percentage of GDP	
India	78.6	2.9
Pakistan	21.0	6.8
Bangladesh	15.5	5.4
Nepal	8.1	28
Sri Lanka	7.5	8.1
Bhutan	0.0	1.8
The Maldives	0.0	0.1

Source: The Kathmandu Post. (2019, 17 October). Available at <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2019/04/10/nepal-is-19th-largest-receiver-of-remittances-with-81-billion>.

Even when they make huge contributions to their respective country's economy, these migrants confront many challenges, from acquiring visa and permission for migration to the insecurity at every walk of the post-migration period. Nepali migrants in Malaysia face serious insecurities that caused the death of one migrant every day in 2018. Intermediaries play a key role in this migration, particularly deciding the destinations and works. Safety at the destination point has appeared as an extremely critical issue. Nepal Poverty Report (Keshav, 2019) documents the growing vulnerability of these migrants abroad who have also faced death. The problem of insecurity surrounding migrant workers has also contributed towards bringing more stringent provisions in the emigration laws as is evident from the developments in Sri Lanka. The non-inclusion of family members and dependents within the purview of emigration laws has caused serious challenges to the international migrants from India. Afghanistan has experienced the challenge of forced returnees in a big way. Taking together, the national policies on emigrants of South Asia are marked by many shortcomings and adhocism.

Box 5.7: Authoritarian Framework of Migration in the Maldives

The influx of migrant workers in the Maldives took place under an authoritarian institutional framework that had failed to protect the basic rights for the people in general and for migrant workers in particular. Constitutionally, there is now a relatively progressive labour rights framework for migrant workers. However, gaps still exist in the overall legal framework and more so in enforcement. In practice, discrimination, exploitation and trafficking of migrant workers have been pervasive. Successive governments have failed to prioritise to address issues facing them. Little civil society and organised labour activism exists on their plights.

Source: SAAPE, Kathmandu. (2019). Migration: Trajectory, patterns, and factors (Maldives Poverty Report).

India has the largest number of migrants abroad in the world. The country is also the recipient of the biggest amount of remittance, with an inflow that touched 78.6 billion US dollar in 2018. The first emigration act of the country was enacted by the British government in 1922. The objective was to regulate indentured emigration. 'Although the purpose of the 1922 act was to ensure that labour is not exploited when away from the home country, it did not take into account the family members of emigrants who migrate later or along with the migrants' (Rajan et al., 2019, p. 19). The first emigration act of independent India was enacted in 1983 by the Ministry of Labour. The objective of the act was to 'safeguard the rights of Indian migrants, most of whom were semi-skilled and unskilled labourers' (Rajan et al., 2019, p. 20). One of the serious

flaws of the act was that either the family members or the dependents who accompanied or departed later to visit the emigrant were not under the purview of the act. The act also did not have any protection or welfare measures for the family members or dependents. 'Only those emigrants who are low skilled and travelling to 18 countries in the Gulf and South-East Asia are required to go through emigration clearance... But, if the low-skilled worker has a qualification of Class 10 or higher or is travelling to any other country, they are exempted from the ECR category and thus, from the purview of the 1983 act. The key operational assumption here is that those emigrants who are unskilled or low-skilled need additional protection as they are more vulnerable than higher-skilled migrants or migrants moving to more developed countries' (Rajan et al., 2019, p. 20). Apparently positive for the unskilled workers, this has, however, put a lot of restrictions on them and also proved to be discriminatory. The Ministry of External Affairs, 35 years after the act, floated the Draft Emigration Policy, 2019. This policy aims to shift the attention of the law from regulation to that of management of the migrants. However, critics have pointed out that there are no practical changes in the core contents of the law. It has added several definitional changes as well as a few more statutory bodies. This act continues to exclude the family members and the dependents from its purview together with undocumented and irregular migrants. The intermediaries have come under scrutiny under the draft law, but it does not propose any alternative measures either to supply necessary information or welfare measures at various levels. 'The 2019 draft bill also personifies the government's primary view of emigration policy as a means for managing the export of human capital rather than as a more humanitarian framework for safeguarding Indians overseas' (Rajan et al., 2019, pp. 21-22).

Box No. 5.8: Pre-Departure Training Schemes for Women Migrant Labourers

The composition of the SAARC migrant labourers working in the Middle East countries is diverse although they uniformly belong to the poor strata of the society. With some knowledge of English, Sri Lankan workers are literate compared to their Bangladeshi counterparts who are almost illiterate either in Arabic or English. The Nepalese and Bangladeshi migrants are accused of using forged birth certificates to avail permits for the minors to work as migrant labourers. Indian and Pakistani workers, although relatively educated, do not know their legal rights.

Among the countries in the region, Sri Lanka and Nepal have initiated concrete measures for pre-departure training of all women domestic workers. Sri Lanka has done it in coordination with recruitment agencies through its Bureau of Foreign Employment. Under these training schemes, the women are taught 'housekeeping skills, English, basic hygiene and their legal rights as workers'. The country has also made it clear that women will not take up jobs without a basic salary of 300-350 Jordanian dinars. Through bilateral agreement with Qatar, Sri Lanka has managed the withdrawal of the compulsory police clearance certificate. It was a pre-requisite earlier for all Qatar-bound Sri Lanka workers.

Like Sri Lanka, Nepal, too, has embarked on a pre-departure training programme for women who plan to work as garment workers through HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation. Through the training, the women are equipped with the required understanding of the 'culture of their destination country, working on an assembly line and language skills. In both cases, they are also briefed about their legal rights as workers, and where and how to seek help'.

Source: Mukherji, R. (2016/10 June). SAARC initiative and migrant labour. Millenniumpost. Available on <http://www.millenniumpost.in/saarc-initiative-and-migrant-labour-149419>.

Pakistan is the second among the South Asian nations in terms of sending migrant workers abroad. The country describes itself as highly pro-emigration. During 1971-2013, more than 7 million Pakistanis went abroad for employment through the Bureau of Emigration. Out of this, about 96 per cent headed for the GCC countries (ILO, 2014). While in case of the world as a whole, there is growing feminisation of the migrants, with woman migrants constituting around 42 per cent to the total. In the case of Pakistan, the female migrants' percentage has been exceptionally low—less than one per cent. In 2011, Pakistan was the fifth-highest remittance-receiving country in the world. In 2018, the country was the second-highest remittances receiving country in South Asia, which contributed 6.8 per cent to its national GDP. In 2013, the ILO launched a sub-regional project to promote the management of labour migration from Pakistan, India and Nepal to selected GCC countries. 'The aim of the project is to ensure effective protection of the rights of vulnerable migrant workers, enhance the development impact of labour migration and reduce unregulated migration. The project is implemented with funding from the EU' (ILO, 2014). However, the reports of vulnerabilities, including deaths of migrants from South Asia in GCC countries, suggest that these initiatives have miserably failed.

In the same year, the ILO supported the Ministry of Overseas in developing and finalising the draft National Emigration Policy of Pakistan. The Policy was passed by the interim government. The draft policy proposed a lot of protective measures for the welfare of the overseas Pakistani migrants in line with ILO covenants on migrants. It particularly focused on the women migrants and their welfare as they only account for a minuscule percentage of the total migrants. The policy, however, did not get finalised into a full-fledged one due to a regime change.

Lately, Pakistan saw a drastic fall in its overseas migrants, forcing the country to formulate new emigration policy. The sudden drop in migrants is blamed on the 'Gulfisation' in the GCC countries, as they are gradually shifting focus from the oil sector to the service sectors. The countries in GGC like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are shifting towards employing the nationals in the service sector. They are also reducing the period of working visa. It has been reported that 'in a bid to boost export of human resources, the government of Pakistan is formulating a National Emigration and Welfare Policy for migrant workers to provide them every possible facility during the entire emigration cycle' (Hamza, 2018).

Under these circumstances, the Pakistan government has adopted a series of initiatives, such as:

1. The Bureau of Emigration in Pakistan has started a project titled, "Registration of Intending Emigrants via Biometric Verification System linked with NADRA" to ensure the highest level of efficiency and improvement in service delivery.

- a. A new agreement with State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan (SLICP) has been signed to enhance the insurance coverage duration from 2 years to 5 years.
- b. A Complaint Resolution Mechanism System has been established in the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment to settle issues of the complaints being received from different channels, i.e. from the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat, Community Welfare Attaché, directly in the Bureau etc. (Hamza, 2018).

To what extent these measures will help the Pakistani emigrants cannot be said now. These measures are primarily aimed at the migrants in the GCC countries. The government of Pakistan is in dialogue with the government of the UAE both for skill development projects and safety of the Pakistani emigrants in the country. However, there have been reports of growing insecurity and anxiety of the Pakistani emigrants in other parts of the world. There has been undocumented and unsafe emigration of Pakistanis to many countries of the world including to European countries. They emigrate to overcome the challenges of life in the country but are pushed into unending struggles abroad. Pakistani newspaper Dawn has published a series of such stories (Shah, 2018).

Afghanistan has been the victim of an imperialist onslaught, civil war, barbaric terrorism and natural disasters since the late 1970s. It has caused the country to see migration and emigration on an unprecedented scale. During the post-Soviet intervention period (1979-89) alone, the country saw outmigration of around 5-6 million people. The trend continued during the Taliban regime, too. It has been reported that Afghan refugees alone make up 13 per cent of the total global refugees. Although they are spread almost in 80 countries of the world, however, 91 per cent of them are there in neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan. As the situation gets normalised, since 2001 around 7 million migrants and refugees came back to the country (Parsa, 2019).

Compared to the magnitude of the crisis, the state policies and other institutional initiatives have been very meagre. The dismantling of the institutional foundations of the state both by imperialist forces, civil war and terrorism in the country has made the situation worse. One of the initiatives undertaken to deal with the migration and refugee crises in the country has

been the Joint Way Forward (JWF) agreement signed between the European Union and the government of Afghanistan in October 2016. One of the chief objectives has been to address and prevent the illegal migration and facilitate the return and reintegration process of Afghanistan refugees to their country. This initiative came under severe criticisms, particularly from the International Federation for Human Rights. 'FIDH denounces a shameful deal negotiated in secret, which is bound to violate the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees' (International Federation for Human Rights, 2016). However, the initiatives brought divisions within the government. The Afghan Refugee Minister criticised the move and argued that 'forced expulsion was not an acceptable solution for Afghanistan' (Bjelica, 2016). After the deal, several of the European countries, without considering the situation back in Afghanistan, reportedly started deporting selective Afghan refugees.

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) is the main responsible organisation for returnees²⁵ and internally displaced persons. The ministry is supported by a Consultative Group on Refugees and IDPs which includes Government Ministries, UN agencies, NGOs and donors. The main task of the Consultative Group is to support the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation in its goal to reintegrate Afghan return refugees and internally displaced persons into the society.

In August 2004, the MoRR in partnership with the ILO and UNHCR set up the Employment Service Centre to facilitate the returnee population's search for work (Mehlmann, 2011). It may reasonably be argued that compared to the magnitude of the challenges, these initiatives are not substantive at all. Besides, the neoliberal regimes will continue to bring devastation to the commons, forcing them to move for life and livelihood.

The island country Sri Lanka has witnessed a lot of changes in its emigration laws. The country has achieved a lot in terms of human development compared to its regional partners. However, the civil war and as well as the land and resource grabbing neoliberal regime continue to uproot people, forcing them to move out both within the country and out for livelihoods. One of the noteworthy features of migration in Sri Lanka has been the larger participation of women. This has made the government emphasise women's safety and security. However, such attempts made the emigration laws regimented, causing harassments to the potential women migrants.

²⁵Since 2002, more than 5.6 million Afghans (20 per cent of Afghanistan's total population) are known to have returned to their home country with the assistance of UNHCR. The UNHCR repatriation assistance package for Afghan refugees in 2002 included, among others: a cash grant of 100 US dollar, six bags of wheat and a plastic sheet. In 2011, the organisation increased its cash grant by 50 per cent to an average of 150 US dollar/per person, depending on travelling distance to their destination.

Till the 1970s, the Government of Sri Lanka strictly controlled the migration flows to and from the country. However, the policies on out-migration started changing with the oil boom in the Gulf countries. This was a period that also saw a lot of assertions on the party of Sri Lankan youths for employment and other securities. A more significant development during this period, however, was that the female migrants gradually outpaced the male counterparts as the demand for housemaids in the Middle East rose sharply. The government took a lead in determining the outflow of women by engaging in negotiations and setting up bi-lateral agreements with labour receiving countries which in turn determined the terms and conditions of employment.

It is at this juncture that the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act, 1985 ushered in some major changes to the management of labour migration. This led to the founding of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), a quasi-independent government institution. The Act looks beyond the promotion of labour migration and encompasses other facets such as the welfare of the migrant workers (Arambepola, 2019). The predominance of the members of the recruiting agencies in the Board of Directors and negligible representation of the civil society members brought about contention between the GoSL and civil society organisations (CSOs).

Under the Act, all migrant workers are required to register with the SLBFE before their departure – failure to do so leave them with no recourse to get assistance from the SLBFE while working overseas, especially regarding repatriation. In theory, all migrant workers must register with the SLBFE but in practice, this generally applies only to semi- and unskilled workers and not the professionals working in the same countries (Arambepola, 2019).

In 2013, an under-age domestic worker, Rizana Nafeek from Sri Lanka, who was employed in Saudi Arabia, was executed. It was an embarrassing moment for the Sri Lankan government as there was an outcry against the government on its failure to stay the execution. The government, rather than enacting pro-migrant security provisions, sought to impose restrictions on the mobility of women migrant workers. The new regulation looks to ban under-age women and women with young children from migrating for work overseas as domestic workers. In this backdrop, the Family Background Report (FBR) regulation had been absorbed into a complex state apparatus that continues to be administered against prospective female migrant workers. This was indeed a highly discriminatory regulation. It made all prospective women migrants to go through the process of clearance by the Foreign Employment Development

Officer (FEDO) of the respective Divisional Secretariat (DS) office, which is a local-level administrative unit, in order to migrate. The officer collects data about the woman's family background and disallows women from migrating on conditions such as the absence of a proper female guardian for the children, the presence of children under the age of five and/or any child with a disability (Arambepola, 2019). It has also added more scrutiny through different other committees in the pretext of protecting child and women rights. The entire process has become both cumbersome and complicated. 'In addition to providing basic identity documents and confirmation of their residence, several additional documents pertaining to the children's welfare (including a letter from the school principal), letters from the husband and/or the parents stating their approval for the woman's need to migrate are demanded by some of the FEDOs. The FEDOs in turn, have transformed into a policing force, acting as sleuths to investigate if the documents and information provided by the applicant is accurate' (Arambepola, 2019). These provisions apply only to women migrants not male migrants. Critics have pointed out that the government has entirely failed to address the core concerns regarding the needs of women migrating out of the country. More importantly, the 'FBR unfairly targets the lower-class, unskilled and semi-skilled female workers, rather than the female professionals. There is a general perception that poorer women are unable to provide adequate care for their children and therefore, such a regulation helps ensure that the children left-behind are under proper guardianship. The assumption that educated, middle-class women are better "mothers" and caregivers is merely anecdotal but treated as fact by those administering the regulation locally' (Arambepola, 2019). The imposition of FBR has drastically reduced the number of women migrants and thereby deprived them of better opportunities of livelihoods. Various international human rights agencies have criticised the attempt on the part of the Sri Lankan government for restricting women's rights of mobility.

Both in terms of GDP growth and reduction of poverty, Bangladesh has gained a good repute. The country achieved over 7.0 per cent growth rate in 2016, breaking the stagnant 6.0 per cent growth rate of over one-and-a-half decade. The economy of Bangladesh has been able to support sustained economic growth even in the face of a global financial crisis. The country had also been successful in reducing poverty rate by 1.8 per cent during the 2000-2005 period, by 1.7 per cent between 2005 and 2010 and by 1.2 per cent from 2010 to 2016 each year (Mustaque, 2019).

Box 5.9: 140 Million Internal Climate Migrants by 2050

The World Bank in its 2018 Report titled "Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration" warns that unless urgent actions are taken on climate and development, three regions—Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America—'could be dealing with a combined total of over 140 million internal climate migrants by 2050. These people will be pushed out by droughts, failing crops, rising sea levels, and storm surges'.

The World Bank still holds hope and argues that 'with concerted action – including global efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions, combined with robust development planning at the country level –the number of people forced to move due to climate change could be reduced by as much as 80 per cent – or 100 million people.'

Source: World Bank. (2018/19 March). Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/03/19/meet-the-human-faces-of-climate-migration>.

Microfinance has been glorified globally as a sustainable approach to livelihoods for the poor. Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has been the pioneer in this regard. However, much-vaunted microfinance has not succeeded to alleviate poverty to the extent of ensuring that people do not move out for livelihoods. It has been reported that the number of Bangladeshi out migrants has increased to the tune of over 34 per cent in 2017 alone. Although Bangladesh is a major exporter of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour, most of the export to more than 22 countries is unskilled labour. The composition of Bangladeshi migrant workers is dominated by male where female migrants constitute only 12.1 per cent of the total number of migrants.²⁶ The GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Singapore, are the top destination countries of Bangladeshi migrant workers.

By 2015, there were almost 10.45 million Bangladeshi migrants across the world. They have contributed immensely towards the national economy by sending remittances. To govern the emigrants, Bangladesh has introduced a number of legal instruments. The establishment of the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) was one of the important initiatives. The Overseas Employment and Migrants Act, 2013 (OEMA) is the principal legislation on labour migration from Bangladesh. The Act emphasises the rights, safety and human dignity of migrant workers, making it an obligation of the government to ensure social protection of migrants

²⁶<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2018/03/28/overseas-migration-female-workers-rise-despite-reports-abuse/>.

both at home and in their countries of destination. It also governs the negotiations of MoU with destination countries. The OEMA 2013 is complemented by the Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy (EWOEP), 2016. The law calls for the labour wings of overseas diplomatic missions of Bangladesh to protect the rights of migrants and to provide periodic reports on the status of migrant workers. It also defines the roles of The Government of Bangladesh in signing MoU or bilateral agreements with the country of destination to manage migration. For spreading the services at the local level, the government also established 42 DEMO (District Employment and Manpower Office), 47 Technical Training Centres (TTC), 6 institutes of marine technology and 54 branches of PKB (Bangladesh Civil Society Advocates, 2015).

Whereas these initiatives have been lauded internationally, the civil society organisations working with the migrants and families have raised lots of concerns on a number of issues concerning the safety, access and welfare of the migrants abroad. In a shadow report submitted to the UN Committee on Migrant Workers for its 26th session in response to the List of Issues relating the Initial Report of Bangladesh on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (2015), these organisations pointed out that Bangladesh was far away from fulfilling the international obligations on migrants. Out of the total 30 recommendations submitted through the said report, the following are the significant ones:

- a. To ensure the effective regulation, monitoring and accountability of recruitment agencies;
- b. To conduct autopsy reports in Bangladesh in cases of unexplained deaths abroad;
- c. To develop mandatory and comprehensive compulsory insurance plans for migrant workers that cover expenses such as a worker's injury or death while overseas when engaging in both work and non-work-related activities;
- d. To strengthen the provision and transparency of the specific rights and supports that have been included in the Bilateral Agreements (BLAs) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) of the state party and the Overseas Employment and Migration Act, 2013 (OEMA 2013) and also including them in the country-specific pre-departure training/orientations (Bangladesh Civil Society Advocates, 2015).

The civil society organisations have also demanded the ratification of all major ILO conventions concerning the protection of the migrants.

On 1 January 2019, The Himalayan Times, a newspaper published from Kathmandu, reported that 103 Nepali workers lost their lives due to various reasons in the UAE in 2018. Among them, 8 were women and 95 were men. A total of 44 workers died from natural causes, 3 women and 30 men committed suicide while 2 women and 21 men lost their lives in road accidents (The Himalayan Times, 2019). The same paper reported on 11 December 2018 that one Nepali migrant worker dies in Malaysia every day. In 2018, a total of 322 migrant workers died in the country. The figure was 364 in 2017. The deaths are attributed to 'tuberculosis, liver ailment, dengue, brain haemorrhage, appendicitis, meningitis and other afflictions spike...' The 'Nepali migrant workers also suffered untimely deaths due to lack of required skills for work, and inhospitable situation of Malaysia' (The Himalayan Times, 2018). In November 2018, The Kathmandu Post reported that 'In the last 10 years, Nepal has received Rs. 4.48 trillion—equivalent to USD 38.67 billion—in remittances from migrant workers abroad, particularly from the hundreds of thousands of workers toiling in the Gulf countries. In the same period, 6,708 Nepalis who had gone abroad for foreign employment in search of a better life, returned home in coffins, making the lucrative labour migration one of the deadliest and costliest affairs for the tiny nation' (Mandal, 2018).

These stories illustrate the vulnerability of the international migrants of Nepal. Nepal sends out more than 2 million migrants to work in different countries of the world. From the middle of the first decade of the new century, the flow of international migrants to the GCC countries and Malaysia increased in big numbers. After the enactment of the Foreign Employment Act, 2007, '... during 2008 to 2017, Nepal issued some 3.5 million labour permits to migrant workers, predominantly for travel to Malaysia and nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In the last fiscal year alone, Nepal received remittances worth NPR 699 billion (USD 6.56 billion) from its citizens employed overseas, more than one-quarter of national GDP, the fourth-highest proportion in the world' (Baruah & Arjal, 2018). More than 55 per cent of families in Nepal receive remittances from foreign countries. In 2018, the foreign remittances accounted for 28 per cent of the GDP of the country, amounting 8.1 US billion dollar. These figures show the significance of the international migrants both for the national economy and that of the country.

The international migrants are governed by the Foreign Employment Act, initially adopted in 1985. The Act was amended subsequently but was enacted as a new act in 2007. Foreign Employment Rules have also been framed under the new act that are modified/amended

from time to time. A Foreign Employment Board and Foreign Employment Department have also been established. Nepal has also been an active participant in the Colombo Process of regulating regional migrants and assumed its chair in 2017. The country has also signed Bilateral MoUs with most of the GCC countries about the Nepali migrants in those countries. The Nepal government has also used the private agencies for the recruitment and other processes of Nepali international migrants. All these acts and rules are primarily aimed at easing the process of migration through maximum transparency and the safety of the migrants at the destinations. However, the growing number of deaths of Nepalese migrants abroad questions the efficacy of those laws and regulations. Various reports suggest that the Nepalese migrants have used both informal and un-licensed agencies and insecure routes that made their lives vulnerable.

The 2011 report prepared by the Migrant Forum in Asia titled 'Labour Recruitment to the UAE: Gaps between policy and practice in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Philippines' (MFA, 2011) investigated the role of the recruiting agencies in the four countries. The report investigated the countries that saw an increase in the numbers of recruiting agencies, both licensed and un-licensed. Reflecting on their role, the report has the following submission:

Migrant labour recruitment is a major industry, fuelled by profit. Those who hold the supply have the power to set the price for job placements – i.e. the recruitment agencies in the receiving states. The price for these positions is unregulated, and allowed to increase depending on how much sending state agencies are willing/able to pay. Due to the intense competition among recruiters with each country, and recruiters in different countries, there are enough agencies to keep the receiving state recruiters profitable. Costs get passed on to the migrant workers, and the consequences of this burden manifest in exploitation, fraud, abuse, and all manner of illicit and illegal practices. Sub-agents also benefit from a lack of regulation, as they are able to operate with impunity, again at the expense of migrant workers. (MFA, 2011)

5.7.2 National Policies on Internal Migrants

Whereas the issues concerning the emigrants have received quite a good deal of attention from the end of the national governments in South Asia, the plight of the internal migrants are yet to come to limelight. The plight of the internal migrants, particularly in India, is as worse as the refugees or an NRC excluded person (Bhatia, 2018).

Box 5.10: Plight of the Inter-state Migrants Are Not Different From the Refugees

The policies of the exclusionary states push the inter-state migrants to the level of the refugees who lack citizenship rights. As per the 2011 census, in India alone, the total number of internal migrants is 139 million. Due to the dearth of legal documents, many of them are systematically targeted as illegal migrants and criminals too.

'In India, you do not have to be excluded from the National Register of Citizens to experience a sense of loss of territory, identity, belongingness and livelihood. You could just as easily feel that way if you were a rural-to-urban migrant worker facing dislocation and "uprootedness" - a state of constant threat and anxiety with no sense of control over your spatial and temporal existence. This is akin to the experience of refugees who lack citizenship rights.'

Source: Bhatia, A. (2018). Exclusionary state. *The Hindu*, 13 August. Available at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/exclusionary-state/article24671602.ece>.

However, among the South Asian countries, only India has a law on internal migrants. The country adopted the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act in 1979 which aims to protect the rights of internal migrants. The law ensures the migrant's 'right to equal wages, right to return home periodically without losing wages, and the right to medical care and housing at the employment site. Though the law is not implemented, it does set the standards for just work conditions for migrant labour' (Hisam, 2014). The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act of 1979 was promulgated based upon the belief that the system of employment of interstate migrant labour is exploitative. In many parts of the country and predominantly in states such as Orissa, labour is recruited from various parts of the state through contractors or agents called sardars and taken outside the state to work on large projects. These workers are generally illiterate and are usually forced to work under extremely adverse conditions. Therefore, this legislation was enacted to regulate their working conditions and to provide for minimum conditions of service. The Act applies to every establishment and every contractor employing or having employed five or more inter-state migrant workers at any time during the preceding 12 months. It covers workers recruited by or through a contractor in one state under an agreement for employment in an establishment in another state, with or without the knowledge of the

principal employer. All the legal provisions regarding the registration of the establishment and licensing as applied under the Contract Labour Act are also applicable under this Act, no principal employer is allowed to employ inter-state migrant workers without such a certificate of registration.

Box 5.11: Internal Migrants and Non-portability of Government Benefits Across State Borders

India has been implementing a series of pro-poor entitlement policies. However, the inter-state migrants are deprived of those policies, as they are not portable across state borders. For example, the subsidised food through the Public Distributive System (PDS) covers around 400 million below-poverty line families. The benefit is administered through ration cards, which are issued and administered by the home state government. The same is the case with admission to public hospitals. There are preferential treatments in the case of high education and job opportunities under the control of the state government, too. In India, 'government jobs account for more than half of the employment opportunities for individuals with secondary education and above. State domicile is required for employment in such government entities.' Study reveals that 'these state-level policies inhibit inter-state mobility for both low and high-skilled people'.

Source: World Bank Group. (2017/November). Prepared by Zovanga L. Kone, Maggie Y. Liu, Aaditya Mattoo, Çağlar Özden, Siddharth Sharma. Available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/389841511186819498/pdf/WPS8244.pdf>.

Apart from the 1979 Act, India also enacted the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act in 1970. The Act applies to any establishment in which 20 or more workers are either currently employed or were employed at any time during the preceding 12 months as contract labour, and to any contractor who currently employs or has employed at any time during the preceding 12 months, 20 or more workers. A contract labourer is a worker employed through a contract, either directly issued by an employer or by a labour contractor. The Act does not apply to establishments which carry on work of a casual, irregular or occasional nature. Contractors engaged in the construction of buildings or any other construction activities are covered. Under the Act, contractors must obtain a valid licence from a licensing officer for undertaking or executing any work through contract labour. The license sets out the conditions imposed by the government about working hours, wages and other

aspects of contract labour. The contractor is expected to take care of the welfare and health of the contract labourers by providing certain facilities per the rules promulgated by the government. The facilities to be provided at the work site include canteens, a dining hall, rest rooms, drinking-water facilities, latrines and urinals, first-aid facilities and a day-care centre for children, if 20 or more women are employed. In respect to other provisions, for example, wages are to be paid monthly on a fixed date on a working day at the work-site; wages are to be paid directly to the workers or their specifically authorised representatives; there should be no deductions from wages unless authorised by order of the government and payment of wages must be made in the presence of the authorised representative of the principal employer. The Act also stipulates that registers of attendance, wages, wage deductions and overtime must also be regularly maintained. The workers must sign or put their thumb impression in these registers against all the entries made. The wage rates, working hours, wage period, dates of payment and the names and addresses of inspectors must be publicly displayed for the information of all contract workers.

Interstate Migrant Policy Index 2019, an index compiled by India Migration Now, a Mumbai-based non-profit organisation, has shown that the internal migrants are in decline in India due to discrimination and deprivations of welfare policies. 'The Interstate Migrant Policy Index, 2019 measures whether a state has fair policies for residents and migrants in terms of labour policies, child welfare, housing, social welfare, education, health, sanitation and political participation. It also measures whether a state has additional and ad-hoc policy initiatives wherever needed for migrants to have equality with state residents. The index contains 63 policy indicators across eight policy areas, framed as questions or queries, in order to understand the extent of integration of interstate migrants in a particular (Aggarwal et al., 2019). 'Every state in India has reservations for the state's residents or domiciles in areas such as public sector employment, tertiary education and social welfare schemes such as the public distribution system for food grains. Almost all states are apathetic to the needs of migrants, which stops the latter from accessing jobs, education, welfare entitlements, housing, health benefits and even voting in elections' (Aggarwal et al., 2019). There are exceptions, of course. Kerala is undertaking some important initiatives for the migrant labourers.

Migrant-specific labour welfare schemes, health provisions and child policies are all a part of Kerala's state policy architecture. Initiatives such as issuing alternative identity cards to provide education and welfare services to its migrant workforce, locally called

guest workers, are unique in India. Such consideration of workers adds to the legacy of Kerala's labour-friendly political and institutional ecosystem as well as its own long-standing migration relationship with the Gulf countries, where 89.2% of Keralite emigrants go. (Aggarwal et al., 2019)

Apart from the policy hurdles, internal migrants face serious discriminations due to regionalism and growing ethnic and identity assertions in the country. The constitutional protections under Article 371 are meant for the indigenous people. However, the onslaught of the neoliberal regimes on the land and other resources of the indigenous communities are making them obsessive and chauvinist. These have made the migrants increasingly vulnerable. The chauvinist politics of any kind explores the 'enemies' for the sustenance of their politics. The outcry against the labourers from Bihar and UP in Mumbai steered by the Navnirman Sena (MNS), which took a violent

turn in 2008, is a testimony to the vulnerabilities of the migrants in the hands of the chauvinists. What is interesting to point out here is that the around 70 per cent of the migrants in Mumbai are from the state within. Despite this, the anti-migrant tirade in Mumbai has been very strong. One of the key factors behind it has been the growing insecurities at a different level. For example, employment opportunities had fallen drastically in Mumbai in the first decade of the new century due to the closure of textile industries. No new industry has been set up to absorb those who have been displaced from their jobs. The employment rate in the manufacturing sector in the megacity declined from 41 per cent in 1960 to 20 per cent in 2001 (The Times of India, 2012). In the region of Northeast India, particularly in Assam, the anti-foreigner, especially, anti-Bangladeshi sentiments also targets the poor Bengali Muslim labourers who are otherwise Indian citizens.

Box: 5.12: Discriminatory Citizenship Laws in Bhutan

Bhutan, the country famous for Happiness Index, has discriminatory citizenship laws which are detrimental to the Nepali-origin citizens in the country. The implementation of the controversial 1985 Citizenship Act without the endorsement of the National Assembly of Bhutan was indeed a testimony to the highhandedness on the part of the authorities. The enumeration exercise being conducted in the late 1980s by the Ministry of Home Affairs through the framework of F1 to F7 categories and the One Nation, One People Policy were exclusionary in nature. For example, "One Nation, One People" policy required wearing of "Gho" and "Kira" on all occasions. It also resulted in dropping the Nepali language from school curriculum and restriction on the practice of Hindu religion and Nepali culture.

Source: Dhakal, D. N. S. (2019). Migration: Complex issues in Bhutan. (Nepal Poverty Report, SAAPE, Kathmandu).

The experiences of other countries in the region have been worse than India in addressing the woes of the internal migrants. Internal migrants are four times greater than the international migrants. However, policy makers have neglected it almost entirely. The national labour policies or national migration policies indeed fail to even mention the internal migrants. In Pakistan, internal migration is almost absent in the policy discourses. 'There is no law protecting the rights of internal migrant workers in Pakistan. The state has never come up with specific schemes to integrate multi-ethnic migrant workers in the cities. Internal migration, which is integral to urbanisation and development, has been a missing element in urban policies. There is no civil society initiative exclusively for the benefit of internal migrant workers' (Hasim, 2014).

Pakistan has witnessed an unprecedented wave of rural-to-urban migration due to 'the demise of the village self-sufficiency model—a product of caste structures and a barter economy, both of which are in their last

throes.' At present, the state has no plans for dealing with the migrant influx nor is it in a position to provide them with homes. To respond to these problems, low-rise and low-income settlements near places of work or town centres are informally becoming high-rise, with all the physical and social problems of unplanned densification. The units are also becoming increasingly smaller to make them more affordable. Meanwhile, for the first time in Pakistan's urban areas (especially in Karachi and the larger cities), we are seeing people sleeping under bridges, roundabouts, pavements and open-air 'hotels' (Hasan, 2018).

Bangladesh is yet to produce policies on internal migrants. A paper published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), titled 'Bangladesh Internal Migration in Bangladesh: Character, Drivers and Policy Issues' (2013), concludes that the 'Government has long recognised the value of external (international) migration, yet recalling summary arguments made at the opening of this paper, internal movements

potentially have a stronger contribution to make to the growth process and to poverty reduction. A final recommendation, therefore, is for a greater profile be accorded to these issues. There is a need for an open and informed debate, and a suite of policies couched within a national framework, if not a national strategy for domestic migration' (UNDP, 2013). The report has suggested some policy initiatives. It recommends: 'Given the primacy of economic motivations, and the importance of migration for on-going economic expansion, better management of migration must be a major focus for Government. There are also questions of distributional equity to be considered, not least the interplay with poverty reduction and the role migration plays in reducing chronic environmental vulnerabilities. It is important that migration is facilitated and managed, bearing down on socioeconomic failures while also realizing the potential gains' (UNDP, 2013).

The other countries in the region have not formulated any substantive policy initiatives for internal migrants.

5.8 Conclusion

States' responses to migration, emigration and refugees/returnees in South Asia have been casual in nature. Despite lot of policy shortcomings, the international migrants, however, have received attention on two grounds: the remittances received by these countries which constitute a substantive part of their respective GDPs, and the media focus on those migrants. However,

this has not made the states accountable to the overall welfare of the migrants as is evident from the plight of the Nepalese emigrants in the GCC countries. The returnee's plights have also been extremely worrisome as is clear from the Afghanistan experience. On refugees too, the governments have been driven by political objectives and religious, linguistic and ethnic affinities as is the case with the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. India's approach to non-Muslim refugees, whom the government seeks to grant citizenship exclusively on religious identities, shows the parochialism of the state responses. However, the worst response of the state responses has been to the internal migrants. They are stateless without losing the state's legal recognition. They are either climate refugees within their countries or displaced persons without any protection from the end of the state. They are human entities meant for profiteering by others. Consolidation of the neoliberal regimes and their obsession with the appropriation of resources have been pushing the internal migrants to the brink. Malnutrition, health hazards, illiteracy and the tag of outsiders within their own countries make them run from one place to another to live a life without rights and dignity. For them, their identity of citizenship has no meaning. They are subject to circumstances and subjects of the regimes who steer profit over their labour. Neither international protocols nor the social protection policies have helped them to overcome the cycles of poverty and unfreedom.

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CHAPTER

6

Impact of COVID-19 on Migration in South Asia

Impact of COVID-19 on Migration in South Asia*

Babu P Remesh

6.1. Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the entire world. Migrants are among the worst affected, as the spread of the pandemic resulted in multi-layered problems to them, adding to their insecurities and vulnerabilities. This chapter discusses the impact and implications of COVID-19 on the migration scenarios of South Asian countries. While doing so, due attention is given to internal, intra-regional and international segments/streams of migration, as well as to the issues of refugees and undocumented/illegal migrants, drawing insights from various South Asian countries.

6.2. COVID-19 and Internal Migration

As discussed in Chapter 2, most of the South Asian countries have prominent streams of internal migration. In countries like India, the quantum of internal migrants far exceeds the stock of international migrants. Given this, it is important to look at the impact of the pandemic on internal migrants in South Asian countries.

The first impact of COVID-19 on internal migrants is immediate unemployment and other labour market distortions, including pay-cuts and temporary layoffs. When the countries of South Asia moved to a sudden lockdown mode with no consultation or discussion within Parliaments, with confederates of industry, Trade unions etc., the internal migrants were the first ones to lose their jobs and their livelihoods. The imposed curfews prevented people from seeking and arranging for alternatives in survival.

With large-scale closure of factories, enterprises, construction-sites and a sudden stoppage of most of the service sector activities, the migrants had to face the axe of sudden unemployment and displacement. Many of them lost their jobs and many others were forced to agree for pay-cuts, unpaid leaves and temporary layoffs. The poorest

of the poor among the migrants were the worst-hit, as their job-loss was also intensified with acute deficiencies in terms of income, food and shelter. Parsa (2020) explains that the imposition of lockdown denied the means of livelihood for thousands of daily wage earners. To many of them, no movement means no work, which means no food in the next days and weeks. A large proportion of migrants were not in a position to abide by the lockdown measures announced by the state due to their precarious livelihood situation.

When COVID-19 entered as a game-changer overnight, many of the migrants found themselves jobless without any means of supporting themselves for their basic needs such as food, shelter in their host localities. In most of the cases, the employers and the sourcing-agents got rid of the migrants without paying any relief or compensation. This led to tensions in many places within South Asia. The countrywide protest of Bangladesh's garment workers demanding payment of pending salaries is an example of this. Given such situations, within a few days, the migrants found it difficult to continue in the urban centres without any support. More importantly, not only the employers and contractors but the state machinery was also not ready (or prepared enough) to provide effective support to the migrants—even for a few days—in terms of assuring basic food and accommodation. Such a situation led to a massive exodus of internal migrants (back home), which was unprecedented in the history of most of the South Asian countries.

As one country after another started imposing lockdowns in quick succession with a varying degree of restriction, there was not enough time given to the migrants to go back to their native places, if they desired to do so. Consequently, immediately after the lockdown, the panic-stricken, ill-informed and resource-poor migrants decided to return home, at a time when all the transport arrangements and other services (including shops, restaurants) were all closed. In many cases, borders between states (and even districts/provinces) were closed. This led to the

*This report was ready for publication before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, given the far-reaching implications of Covid-19 pandemic on the migration scenario of South Asia, it was decided to include this additional chapter in the report.

situation of 'stranded-migrants' in the host regions (where they worked) and en route to their native places (e.g. borders of states and districts, within a country).

In India, thousands of migrants congregating near Uttar Pradesh-Delhi border and migrant workers agitating to go back home in various parts of the country (e.g. Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and so on), got wide media attention, as the gathering of thousands of workers breaking the lockdown restrictions and trying to somehow reach their homes was quite an unprecedented episode, which even reminded one about the great exodus during India-Pakistan partition in 1947.

The panic and miseries faced by the migrants during their homeward journeys have been unique and alarming. As there were travel restrictions and suspension of public transport systems, in all South Asian countries, thousands of migrants chose to go back to their villages on their own (mostly on foot), without food and basic resources with them. This led to miseries and starvation to thousands of internal migrants. Many of them lost their lives during their return journeys due to hunger, dehydration, cardiac arrests and in accidents. In India, as per reports, by mid-May 2020, more than 100 persons lost their lives on their way back to villages in road accidents alone.

Box 6.1: Homebound Migrants Run over by Train in Aurangabad, India

In an incident happened in Aurangabad (in Maharashtra, India), 16 migrants, who were on their return journey to their native places in Madhya Pradesh were run over by a train (as these exhausted migrants were sleeping on the railway track, thinking that there will not be any trains running during the lockdown period).

Source: BBC News (2020).

Migrants had to face lots of humiliations, too, during their way back to native places. In an incident that happened in North India, migrants were doused with disinfectants sprayed with hose pipes. This incident brought in a lot of hue and cry from human right activists and later on even courts in India condemned the inhuman act, and directed the states to treat migrants with dignity and to provide them with the basic minimum facilities – healthcare, transport and food.

In most of the South Asian countries, migrants were forced to leave their places of work/stay, as there were no basic minimum social security systems to support them during this period of crisis. The resultant large-scale exodus and the miseries faced by the migrants reflect the failure of the states in providing the basic income, food security and basic social protection to the vulnerable-most migrants. The miseries of the garment and factory workers in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka during lockdowns were widely reported in the media. In Bangladesh, due to a lack of clarity among the factory owners regarding re-opening of the readymade and garment (RMG) forced thousands of workers to initially go to their native places and then to return to Dhaka, leading to pain and suffering.

Government-run mechanisms and support systems in various South Asian countries are found visibly inadequate and inefficient in terms of arranging adequate travel facilities and providing food and shelter to migrants. There was also laxity about ensuring basic healthcare facilities to these poorest of the poor. Migrants are found to be the most left-out groups in terms of the reach of healthcare protection and food safety measures. Many of them were not in a position to follow and understand the need for social/physical distancing and other sanitary norms prescribed by the governments, as for them this period turned out to be a life and death battle with hard realities such as loss of livelihoods, absolute starvation and endless struggle for getting back to their native places.

All these led to a situation where migrants have become more vulnerable to the contagion. Due to their overall backward situation, the majority of the migrants cannot even stay away from actively seeking work. Thus, the possibility of migrants falling prey to coronavirus infection increased by manifold.

Since many of the South Asian workers are staying in congested labour camps and urban slums with "bed-space" accommodations, they are not in a position to follow physical distancing and self-isolation norms. In many of the urban slums of metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kabul, Dhaka and Karachi, migrants are living in cramped spaces, with shared toilets and unhygienic sanitation facilities. This puts them in the high-risk group,

which is highly prone to local transmission of COVID-19.

The absence of adequate healthcare facilities adds to the vulnerability of migrants. It is quite evident that the availability of public healthcare facilities is near to non-existent in most of the migrant neighbourhoods. Apart from this, many other reasons support the argument of the inefficiency of the state/government framework. While there were no basic social-protection in the migrant-receiving pockets, the lack of preparedness to receive the returning migrants in the native places is also indicative of the failure of the state. As the crisis unfolded, it was evident that none of the South Asian countries had any effective legislation or state-sponsored scheme to immediately address the issues of the migrants and to provide them with some quick relief.

Many of the migrants faced lots of difficulties in entering their native places. Villages rejected the returnee migrants, fearing them as potential carriers of the virus. In India, there were instances where gates of the villages were closed to prevent the entry of return-migrants by erecting barricades and dumping of trees or by digging trenches, with some of the youngsters entrusted to guard the entry points of their localities (Al Jazeera, 2020).

Further, most of these source regions of migrants are not equipped with adequate healthcare and quarantine facilities, as these localities are already backward/resource-poor.

Box 6.2: Tree-Men of Purulia: Social Isolation of Return-Migrants in Rural India

In the Purulia district of West Bengal, seven return-migrants were forced to take temporary shelters in trees, as their villagers decided that they should undergo isolation before entering their villages. As they were refused entry to villages and as the area had a frequent threat of wild elephants, these migrants had to take temporary shelters on branches of trees (by attaching cots to branches). It was only after 5 days of such forced-stay on trees, they were moved to a health centre by the local authorities.

Source: Al Jazeera (2020).

The massive return of internal migrants to their native villages also resulted in a major 'reversal of the rural to urban pattern of migration'. In most of the countries in South Asia, there are large numbers of internal migrants. Mostly, they are rural

to urban migrants who are essentially the victims of 'rural distress, a characteristic feature of most of the South Asian countries. Migration has been a survival strategy for these rural poor and the flows of remittances from these migrants are very crucial for the survival of their dependent families. When the COVID-19 outbreak suddenly reversed rural to urban migration flows, its immediate implication for the rural households was the drying up of remittance flows.

The large-scale return of migrants back to their homes, empty-handed, is going to have very far-reaching implications. Some of these migrants are to be rehabilitated and absorbed into rural labour markets and some of them may want to go back again to their urban destinations, once the threat of pandemic subsides. Return of migrants back to their villages also adds pressure on native communities already struggling to support themselves. Thus, return-migration means an escalation of the 'rural crisis'. Many reports are warning that if effective policies are not in place, what is awaiting them in rural areas will be starvation-deaths and suicides.

It is unprecedented that millions of internal migrants in South Asia are now returning home. Some of these migrants may again go back to their destination regions, once the threat of COVID-19 subsides and the workplaces come back to their usual level of functioning. But, some of them will not return to the destinations again. Consequently, in both short- and long-run, more and more people will compete for the existing resources in the village economy. There will be a considerable increase in disguised unemployment, and the rural wages will further go down, as more and more people are ready to take up the limited job opportunities available in their native areas. This will further deepen rural distress.

While many of the migrants were forced to leave their host destinations due to the pandemic, there were also incidents where migrants were forced to provide their work during the lockdown. In some cases, migrants were forcefully retained by contractors (at times with the help of governmental/administrative machinery) by infringing their freedom to go back to the native places. In Mumbai, Surat and Hyderabad in India, there were conflicts between migrants and contractors/state authorities, as the migrants felt that they are forcefully 'retained' in their residential colonies, as their employers wanted them to be

readily available for work, whenever the lockdown is relaxed.

Thus, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown in South Asian countries have hit the poorest of the poor internal migrants heavily, affecting their livelihoods, their basic freedoms and dignity at the destinations. Job loss, salary cuts and forceful containment and forced-work, unhygienic and cramped living conditions, inadequate health care and social protection are the major issues of migrants destination localities. The far-stretched homebound journeys indicate that there have been hardly any effective government interventions or laws in the South Asian countries to address the issues of internal migrants during this pandemic. It is also evident that most of these countries do not have any basic facilities in place to receive and rehabilitate the returning migrants. Given this, there is a visible trend of rural distress, which is going to worsen in the coming months.

6.3. Impact of COVID-19 on Intra-regional Migration in South Asia

As we discussed in Chapter 2, the countries within South Asia have many streams of migration within the region. India-Nepal; Nepal-India; Afghanistan-Pakistan; Bangladesh-Maldives; Sri Lanka-Maldives; India-Maldives are some of the major streams of such intra-regional migration. By now, it is evident that the unexpected advent and spread of COVID-19 have affected all these migration streams considerably.

The Maldives has thousands of poor migrants from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and Nepal. Majority of these migrants are informal sector workers without secure employment and social security coverage. Most of them lost their jobs during the pandemic and have been struggling to go back to their native places. By mid-May 2020, India had taken back around 4,000 people who lost their jobs. Similarly, around 1,000 Bangladeshis staying in the Maldives have been repatriated. In contrast, the Government of Sri Lanka initially informed its citizens to “stay put” and not seek repatriation immediately. Till the end of May 2020, Sri Lanka had brought back only 284 of the 7,000 Sri Lankans who were seeking repatriation (Colombo Page, 2020).

Despite this, there are thousands of stranded workers in the Maldives who are going through miserable living conditions. As per reports, many of these workers have been moved to

makeshift settlements – notoriously known as “corona prisons” because of their inhuman living conditions. Here, we can see that the migrants are differentially treated during the pandemic in their host destinations/countries. Several media reports support this argument; for example – there are reports from Nepal that migrant workers from the country are not treated on par with Indian citizens in India when it comes to COVID-19 testing, hospitalisation and so on.

In Afghanistan, the number of migrants returning from Iran and Pakistan has picked up considerably since the outbreak of the pandemic. According to the estimates of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 271,000 Afghans have returned from Pakistan and Iran between January 2020 and the first week of May 2020. After reaching their native places, they are finding it very difficult to sustain. Accordingly, now there is an out-migration trend back to Iran from Afghanistan!

There are also reports where thousands of Nepali and Indian migrants are stranded near the India-Nepal border due to the closure of borders. The worries of home-bound Assamese labour from Bhutan are yet another case.

In all the above cases, it is evident that problems and issues of migrants are not properly addressed by both the sending and receiving countries. In host countries, these migrants have nothing to rely on and thus they often opt for risky journeys to return home empty-handed. As for their own countries, there are no evacuation plans and there are no facilities for testing, quarantine and hospitalisation. The strikingly visible lack of evacuation plans has pushed the migrants to the ‘nowhere citizens’ or stranded people’s category – at borders and forced retention camps.

Box 6.3: Stranded Seasonal Migrants and the Looming Food Scarcity in Nepal

A lot of seasonal migrant workers from Nepal work in India. As per rough estimates, around 2 to 3 million Nepali workers work in India. A lot of these seasonal migrant workers return to their country during the harvesting season. Due to lockdown, most of these workers are stuck in India and are waiting for the time when the authorities would send them back to their country. It is feared that the stranding of migrants in India will lead to labour scarcity during the harvest season in Nepal and hence the country may have to face food scarcity in the coming year.

Source: Paudel (2020) & The Hindu (2020).

6.4. Impact of COVID-19 on International Migration in South Asian Countries

6.4.1. South Asian Migrants in GCC and Other Countries

We have seen in an earlier chapter that millions of emigrants from South Asian countries are working in countries outside the region, and the GCC is the most prominent migrant-receiving region. India has more than 8 million workers in there, and more than half of them are blue-collar workers. In recent times, Pakistan witnessed a huge increase

in migrant flow to Saudi Arabia. The total number of emigrants to the country jumped 63 per cent to 625,203 in 2019. Migrants from countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are also prominently present in the GCC countries. Similarly, all these South Asian countries have a considerable number of migrants working in other countries of Asia and Europe and major proportions of these workers are engaged in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, including those in factories, construction sector, domestic services and other services (such as hospitality services, medical and paramedical jobs and sanitary services).

Box 6.4: Impact of COVID-19 on the International Migration Scenario of Sri Lanka

As of mid-April 2020, the number of Sri Lankans who expressed their desire to return included 17,000 migrant workers and their families, 6,000 students and about 3,000 short-term visa holders. Among migrant workers, there are five major categories of people who were willing to return to their country: whose employment contract has ended, those who were underemployed, those who were laid off, those willing to sacrifice their secure job to save themselves from the COVID-19 situation and those with precarious job situation expecting to be terminated soon (Weeraratne, 2020). These workers were mainly the ones who were present in South Korea, Italy and other European countries.

But as the pandemic spread and Sri Lanka's airports were closed, fear of not being able to return to Sri Lanka has grown. This has been exacerbated by the government's decision to de-prioritise the repatriation of migrant workers from the GCC after a group of returnees from Kuwait were found to have a high number of infected individuals (Arambepola, 2020). Official accounts indicate that 23 migrant workers have died in the GCC after contracting the virus, the number may be higher (Daily Mirror, 2020). The absence of support to migrant workers in the GCC has led to widespread criticism.

In terms of outward migration flows, as compared to the international employment figures of April 2020, 15,000 Sri Lankans departed to different countries for employment. Due to the closure of international travel, approximately 37,500 jobs losses are expected for the 'would have been' migrant workers (Weeraratne, 2020).

The Sri Lankan foreign secretary also raised concern on the absorption of return migrant workers in the labour market, as it is feared that approximately 10,000 return migrant workers will not be able to find a job easily.

Source: News.lk (2020), DailyFT (2020), Weeraratne (2020), Arambepola (2020), Daily Mirror (2020).

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the destination countries, it brought more problems to the migrants than the native populations of those countries, mainly because migrants have fewer resources to rely on and have a greater risk of contracting the virus. In most of the GCC countries, a large number of people infected by coronavirus are migrants. To cite an example, by the third week of June 2020, while the southern state of Kerala in India had less than 20 cases of COVID-19 deaths, the number of Keralites who died in the GCC countries alone stood close to 200.

6.4.2. Labour and Livelihood Issues

The first issue concerning labour and livelihood is that of unemployment, pay cuts and layoffs. Large-

scale unemployment has already become a major problem for the South Asian migrants and in the coming months, this trend is expected to become more poignant. There are many reports regarding the growing rate of layoffs and retrenchments in destination regions which has already led to a considerable dislocation of livelihoods of migrant workers from South Asia. Temporary work shutdowns were/are also very common – where the workers are not paid till their workplaces resume normalcy. Many of the workers who lost their jobs are those working in informal sector jobs and who are without any social security or health insurance coverage, which implies that their status quickly shifts from migrant workers to tramps, overnight.

Job loss is a major problem even for relatively affluent segments of migrant populations from South Asia, who have been working and staying in the Gulf region for quite a long time. As the GCC countries normally do not give citizenships to migrants, the migrants' legal relationship with these countries is strictly linked to their employment status. In such circumstances, even those who have been residing in the Gulf region for quite a long time, job-loss means a signal for returning to their native countries.

Salary/wage cuts have been already reported from many of the receiving countries. This means the migrant workers, who are already facing hardship, are the first victims of the austerity measures introduced by employers to cope up with the economic loss due to the onslaught of the pandemic.

When the countries in the South Asian region had entered the lockdown mode, imposing travel restrictions and cancellation of flights, it also meant stopping the flow of international migrants. In early April 2020, the Nepal government announced that "No labour permits will be issued by the government until further notice due to the coronavirus." Similarly, host countries have also started banning foreign workers, at least as a temporary measure. To cite an example, in early April 2020, Qatar, which employs around 2 million migrants, mainly from Asian countries, had banned the entry of foreigners for quite some time. Similarly, Saudi Arabia suspended international air travel for several weeks. All these short-term measures had resulted in increased miseries for migrants and many of them, found it difficult to deal with the financial crisis due to these unexpected measures.

While job loss is a problem for many of the South Asian migrants in their destination countries, the forceful retention in work is an issue for many others. As a considerable proportion of the South Asian workers are engaged in informal sector jobs and/or in essential services such as domestic work, health care and other frontline services, their services/work were not suspended even during the lockdown periods. In the GCC countries, more migrant workers are engaged in essential services more than the locals.

The case of construction workers employed in the world cup football stadium was reported widely as

an example of such coercive labouring conditions. For most of these workers, workloads were increased even without any increase in wages/salaries. Many of these workers were also forced to work without adequate protective equipment, due to for which many of them fell prey to the pandemic. When the spread of the disease among migrants became an issue, the employers forced the workers to take unpaid leave (see Box 6.5 below). By that time, these workers were trapped with no money for themselves as well as for sending back home to their families since the flight services were at a halt.

Box 6.5: Miseries of South Asian Migrants Working for FIFA World Cup Stadiums in Qatar

Qatar announced the closure of several square kilometres of an industrial area where hundreds of migrant workers from Nepal and other South Asian countries were staying in labour camps, working on the FIFA World Cup 2022 infrastructure project. The entire area has been locked down and is guarded by police, preventing any movement. The step was taken after a few workers were tested positive for coronavirus. The workers in the labour camp were asked to go on unpaid leave with the assurance of food and accommodation.

Source: Arab News (2020).

Additionally, these workers who did not have an option to stop working during lockdown are also found adding to the vulnerabilities of their family members or fellow residents in their residences. As the migrants' residential settlements usually do not have adequate facilities and many of them share cramped living spaces, norms like social/physical distancing and self-isolation are not practicable. Given this, often the migrant settlements become 'Corona Prisons' and migrants become most risk-bearing groups.

As a majority of these informal sector migrants do not have adequate health insurance coverage or protection, they are not in a position to avail medical assistance and treatment, which is often very prohibitive for the migrants in terms of costs. Furthermore, when these facilities are available in a limited manner, health services become inaccessible for even those who can afford to avail them. Here, it needs to be mentioned that undocumented or irregular migrants are most severely affected, as they are not in a position

to even avail the healthcare and social welfare measures provided to the migrants by the host countries as a measure of charity and welfare provision.

6.4.3. Differential Treatment/Discriminations/Hate and Xenophobia

From available reports and evidence, it is quite apparent that there are differential treatments and discriminations in the responses to the pandemic in the countries where South Asian migrants are working in large numbers (e.g. GCC).

Box 6.6: Discriminatory and Anti-labour Responses of GCC Governments

- The Saudi and Bahraini governments have assured that they would take care of their nationals' wages, which automatically excludes a large group of migrant workers that constitute 95% of their workforce.
- The UAE granted autonomy to the employers to revise the wages of their workers, lay them off, break work contracts and put them on unpaid leave to address the crisis due to COVID-19. This has increased the vulnerability of migrant workers, besides considerably affecting their earnings and remittances. Unable to meet the living expenditure, including rent, without any pay, many migrants have returned or are planning to return to their home countries.

Source: Infomigrants (2020).

It is widely reported that as healthcare facilities are limited, often the natives are getting priority over migrants. In such cases, they are relegated to second-grade citizens. The cases of Afghans in Iran and South Asian migrants in Singapore (see Box 6.7 below) support this argument. Parsa (2020) explains that in the time of COVID-19 crisis, the Afghan migrants in Iran are denied access to healthcare services by Iranian doctors and hospitals, as the first preference is given to citizens of Iran.

Some of the recipient countries have been supportive and caring towards migrants. For instance, some of the GCC countries granted visa extensions and provided temporary amnesty to migrant workers. Similarly, some have suspended the forced evacuation of migrants. Notwithstanding all these, when it comes to the

sharing of limited healthcare facilities there is a visible citizen/non-citizen divide. The healthcare capacities of the GCC countries are not enough to cater to all the affected persons in the region. In such circumstances, the concerns of migrants naturally take a back seat. Even if the healthcare facilities are available, the expenses are quite prohibitive for the migrant poor in the GCC.

Box 6.7: Citizen/Non-citizen Divide During Pandemic: South Asian Migrants in Singapore

In Singapore, as per some reports, the public health facilities have been largely oriented around its citizens, and migrants are often left out from the healthcare and welfare measures. While citizens have been entitled to free masks and hand sanitizer by courtesy of the state, migrant labourers have had to rely on independent civic groups for these provisions.

Similarly, the norms like social distancing are more strictly observed for the citizens of Singapore, where migrants and other marginalised segments are often left out while implementing such preventing measures. The transportation provided to the workers as well as the accommodation arranged is pathetic. Besides, many of the migrants feel that they are locked in prisons.

Source: Ratcliffe (2020).

Along with this, the anti-migrant attitude is picking up momentum. Temporarily stopping the immigration flow to protect local populations from migrants is high on cards for most of the GCC countries. As explained above, some of the countries like Qatar have already resorted to this measure.

There is also the issue of hate and xenophobia, where migrants are considered as the carriers of the virus. The comments of a Kuwaiti actress to "throw the migrants into deserts" had already become a major controversy. Later on, the same actress gave further clarification that she "did not mean all migrants" and her comments are not meant for migrants from Egypt etc. There are also similar responses from public personalities (see Box 6.8 below), which support that the stigmatisation of migrants has become rampant in the destination countries, adding to the social exclusion and social profiling of migrants.

Box 6.8: Xenophobia and Loathing of Migrants: Cases from Kuwait

A Kuwaiti MP's statement on migrant workers brought severe criticism, when the sending of migrant workers back home was termed by him as 'purifying' the country from the possible threat of the virus.

Source: Infomigrants (2020).

Ever since lockdowns and other restrictions like the curb on international air travel started, there have been tensions regarding non-evacuation of South Asian migrants. Some of the GCC countries have

forcefully asserted that they need to take stringent measures against those labour-sending countries, which are not cooperative in the matter of taking back their citizens during the period of crisis. Even now some of the South Asian countries are not ready to allow the return of their natives if they are not having a coronavirus negative certificate. For instance, recently, the Chief Minister of Kerala, the largest migrant-sending state (province) in India, stated that the government would allow only those migrants who have records to state their COVID-19 negative status, to come back to Kerala. Similar cases are reported from other countries of South Asia, too (see Boxes 6.9 and 6.10 below).

Box 6.9: Unwanted from Both Sides: Coronavirus Positive Pakistani Migrants in UAE

About 1.5 million Pakistanis stay in the UAE. Amidst the coronavirus pandemic, the government arranged for the repatriation of their workers after proper testing. Those whose results were found positive were not allowed to travel. The proportion of people who are denied of travelling back to Pakistan is as high as 12-13% of applicants per flight. In some cases, this proportion goes even up to 40-50%. The UAE officials have warned to review their labour hiring policies if Pakistan continues to deny the return of infected migrants. Amidst all these diplomatic blame game, the migrant workers are those who suffer the most.

Source: Al Jazeera (2020a).

Box 6.10: Denial of Right to Return Home: Nepali Migrants in India and UAE

Thousands of Nepali citizens were stranded in their destination countries, as reported by Human Rights Watch (HRW). Many of these Nepali migrants were stranded in Indian borders at Darchula. There were also instances of some desperate migrants trying to swim across the Mahakali River to reach their homeland and eventually got arrested.

Many Nepali migrants in the UAE got stranded there, as they lost their jobs and could not find a way to return to Nepal, in a situation where their home-country has stopped international flights and their embassy in the UAE was not addressing their issues. HRW reports the case of a few Nepali taxi drivers who lost their jobs and are taking turns to share their limited accommodation (and even using parks for sleeping), without adequate food and support systems (Ganguly, 2020).

In mid-April 2020, the Supreme Court of Nepal directed the government to bring back the stranded migrant workers during COVID-19 crisis, who were denied permission to come back to their homeland as the return-migrants were suspected to be carriers of the pandemic and as the country did not have enough healthcare facilities to receive the return-migrants.

Source: Ganguly (2020) & Sharma (2020).

6.4.4. Issues Related to Return, Re-integration/ Rehabilitation

By the end of June 2020, there were still thousands of migrants longing to come back to their native places. Most of these people are stranded in their destination countries due to the closure of international air travel or due to inadequate evacuation arrangements. As there is a lack of

preparedness in home countries for testing, quarantine and providing healthcare relief, the South Asian countries are mostly not in a position to bring back those migrants who are keen on returning. A good chunk of these migrants is longing for return are those who lost their jobs and who are in difficult situations – i.e. those who stay in cramped labour camps, those who are in poor

health conditions (including pregnant women, elderly, children and those with co-morbid health conditions). When the migrants are not in a position to come back to their native land, they are eventually pushed into a situation 'stateless / nowhere people', as neither their native countries nor their host countries own and support them during this difficult period. Most of the migrants are without medical insurance and thus cannot access and afford healthcare facilities.

There are short- and long-term challenges regarding migrants that have arrived at their home countries. In the short-term, there are issues like providing them facilities for quarantine, healthcare and for self-isolation. In a pandemic situation, having enough healthcare facilities for testing and treatment is very important. But all South Asian countries are considerably lagging in this aspect, as most of them have poor health infrastructure (for testing, quarantine and hospitalised treatment). The public expenditures for health care for many of the South Asian countries stand deplorably low: for instance, 0.91% of GDP for Pakistan, 1.28% for India, 1.5% for Sri Lanka and 2.27% for Bangladesh.

There are also many areas where South Asian governments need to give immediate attention. These include measures to provide care and support to return-migrants and to ensure that they are not subjected to social exclusion and xenophobia, as ill-treatment and social isolation of return-migrants are now widely reported, especially because they are considered as carriers of the virus.

While regarding welcoming and integrating the returning international migrants too, there are many urgent needs like providing them with some cash assistance to meet the immediate requirements, providing relaxations in loan repayment/EMIs and so on. Further, there is a need for integrating those who want to stay back in the native labour markets. Some of the migrants require some assistance for again going back to their jobs abroad. Effective support in terms of creation of new skills and ensuring safe re-integration to their former host countries (by arriving at bi-lateral arrangements etc.) are also expected from the state. Nevertheless, there is not much headway in any of these matters, so far, in all South Asian countries.

6.5. Decline in Remittances

The large-scale unemployment and other miseries of international migrants will also have its ripples in their native economies, as in most of the South Asian countries, the living standards of the native population are heavily dependent on the remittances from abroad. Remittances have been a steady source of income for the South Asian countries, with exceptions like the Maldives (with a negligible proportion of remittances) (World Bank, 2020a). In countries like Nepal and Bangladesh and India, thousands of families are dependent on the remittances from international migrants. In Nepal, international remittances are more than one-fourth of the GDP. India alone has more than 30 million people abroad and more than half of the remittances in India are from the GCC countries.

As Bangladesh's rural economy will be affected considerably, given its status as one of the top-10 remittance earning countries in the world.

In the past few months, due to the spread of COVID-19, there has been a large-scale return of Bangladeshi migrants from Gulf countries. Almost 2 lakh workers have returned to Bangladesh within one month and more are expected to reach back home (Sakib, 2020). The resultant decline in remittances is expected to adversely affect the livelihoods of many rural families, which are dependent on migrant workers (Harvard University, 2020). In Nepal, where international remittances constitute almost 30% of GDP (Johnson, 2020), a huge decline in the remittances implies looming distress for the families of migrants.

It is expected that the remittance-flow to South Asian countries will be considerably affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As per a recent estimate, the remittances from GCC to South Asian countries are expected to dip by 22 per cent in 2020, which is also partly due to the economic slowdown that began with the oil-market crisis (World Bank, 2020).

6.6. Miseries of Refugees and Stateless People During Coronavirus Crisis

While most of the resource-poor migrants are sufferers due to the pandemic and the subsequent miseries, among the hardest hit are refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants.

South Asian countries have many streams of refugees and asylum seekers, which include Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran; Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, who are spread across in various South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal. As per UNCHR's recent estimates, India has more than 2 lakhs "population of concern"—i.e. refugees and asylum seekers—of which around 19,000 are Rohingya refugees. These refugees are spread over different states/UTs such as Jammu, Haryana, Punjab, Telangana and Delhi. Similarly, Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar area is considered as the world's largest refugee settlement, accommodating close to one million Rohingya refugees.

India also has a huge number of Tibetan refugees, whose refugee status is formally recognised by the Government of India. There are also Chakma refugees settled in the North-eastern states, who are victims of a dam construction project in the 1960s in the Chittagong hill tracts of today's Bangladesh (they also faced religious persecution). There are also thousands of Tamil refugees who had escaped persecution in Sri Lanka, following the civil war. Apart from this, there are around 11,000 refugees from Afghanistan (excluding asylum seekers). Unlike for the Tibetans and Sri Lankans, India has not granted the status of refugees to the Afghan people. As the country is not a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees (1951) and the accompanying protocols (1967), the issues of these refugees are also largely attended by the UNCHR.

The crisis period of the pandemic and lockdown has been very difficult for these 'stateless population', who had already been in a precarious situation, even before the pandemic.

The first hit is on income and livelihood. Many of the refugees who were relying on local jobs lost their income earning avenues. For instance, as the walnut factories in Jammu are closed, around 1,500 Rohingyas are estimated to have lost their source of livelihood. There are also cases where refugees move for employment within the host countries like internal migrants. These migrant-refugees also are among the hard-hit during times of coronavirus pandemic. Many such Sri Lankan Tamil 'migrant-refugees', who are working as manual labour

(e.g. painters) who had moved to other districts within Tamil Nadu (or even outside the state) are coming back to their original settlements, adding more population pressure and fear of pandemic to these makeshift settlements, which lack even basic facilities like clean water and hygienic living conditions.

As the refugees are staying in makeshift shelters, social/physical distancing, self-isolation is impossible for them. Furthermore, issues are arising out of their resource-poor nature. Cramped living conditions, a lack of hygienic environment, the absence of proper sanitisation facilities etc. add to their vulnerabilities. Even the refugees cannot afford soaps and facemasks. They also do not have any access to adequate healthcare, given their status as undocumented or illegal migrants. In many cases, the governments of the host countries do not consider it as necessary to provide healthcare and welfare measures to these stateless, undocumented illegal people. In such situations, there are reports that Afghani refugees in India need not be getting the state-arranged medical support, as they are not statutorily entitled to get these benefits.

Social protection measures in South Asian countries are mostly citizen-centric. Thus, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants are often left out on social safety nets and relief measures. For instance, in Delhi, there are many complaints that Rohingya refugees are not getting packages announced by the government. There are also many complaints from refugee settlements that when municipal authorities spray disinfectants in residential areas, the refugee settlements are left out.

As most of the South Asian countries have not ratified the refugees, the governments are also not legally bound to attend to the needs of the refugees. In many cases, as refugees are treated as "illegal migrants", the food and income/livelihood assistance provided by the government are not reaching them. In such a situation, many of the refugee populations are highly dependent on the relief measures provided by UNCHR and local NGOs. But, during periods of lockdown, even NGOs sometimes finding it difficult to reach them.

Box 6.11: Rohingya Refugees or ‘Corona Bombs’: Islamophobia During Pandemic

There are reports from India that the pandemic and resultant crisis also led to a situation where the Rohingya Muslim refugees are highly subjected to negative social profiling. Islamophobia has picked up steam during this period, especially after it was reported that some of the Rohingya refugees from different refugee camps spread across India had participated in the Tablighi Jamaat Congregation held at Delhi’s Nizamuddin area, which had later become a hotspot and source region of virus spread all over India.

As the Home Ministry also issued an alert to union territories and states pointing out the possibilities of Rohingyas spreading the virus, the issue has become more communally sensitive.

The possibility of Rohingyas contracting COVID-19 also led to hate speeches against them and the Muslim community as a whole. TV 19 Bharat Varsh, a TV channel, went as far as calling the Rohingyas as “Corona bombs”.

In this way, the pandemic also added to the communalisation and targeting of the refugees, with distinct signs of islamophobia and xenophobia towards refugees as a carrier of the disease.

Source: Bose (2020) and other media clippings.

In Sri Lanka, coronavirus has also led to an increase in Islamophobia with certain laws being enforced which clash with the religious practices of people of a different religion. The government has made cremation mandatory COVID-19 deaths, which is against the religious belief of Muslims. As per reports, the Buddhist nationalists have even blamed Muslims for the spread of coronavirus in Sri Lanka and even instructed people not to make purchases from any Muslim-owned shops (Qazi, 2020). This kind of rhetoric can deeply impact the small vendors and informal workers who are mostly migrants in the cities. Similar instances of negative profiling of Muslims and anti-Muslim

campaigns have happened in some places in India too (see Box 6.10).

In Bangladesh, a healthcare disaster is looming in the refugee settlements, as per the available reports. By mid-May 2020, a few people were tested positive for COVID-19 in the crowded refugee camps of Cox Bazar (world’s largest refugee camp), where most of the residents are having limited access to clean water and most of them are living in overcrowded and congested conditions. In such cases, hundreds of people are sharing the same toilets and bathroom facilities, with nearly no healthcare facility available to them.

Box 6.12: Miseries of Undocumented Afghans in Iran

Because of the spread of coronavirus in Afghanistan, there has been a massive exodus of Afghans from Iran to Afghanistan. Approximately 140,000 undocumented workers from Iran returned to Afghanistan since the outbreak of the pandemic. After the ease of restriction in Iran, migrants from Afghanistan started pouring in in large numbers. There are reports that many of these undocumented Afghan migrants are treated inhumanly in the Afghan-Iran borders.

Sources: Bezhan (2020) & ICMPD (2020).

6.6. Impact on Women’s Migration/Gender Dimensions of COVID-19

While assessing the impact of COVID-19 on migrants from South Asia, there is a need to have a special focus on women migrants. Undoubtedly, women are the hardest hit among the migrants. Be it in the case of internal, intra-regional or international migrations, women migrants are mostly working with low paid, less protected, informal jobs as domestics; as domestic workers, factory workers and so on. The pandemic and

the resultant lockdown meant either loss of livelihoods or considerable deterioration in working conditions for these women workers. As women are mostly working in the informal sector with low-paid and vulnerable jobs, they do not have paid leaves, social insurance protection or ability to work from home. Often, they have to negotiate with multiple layers of discrimination and inequalities (UN-Women, 2020).

Many of the women migrants from South Asia (both internal and international migrants)

are factory workers. For instance, India has thousands of women working in sectors like garment manufacturing, fish processing and agro-food processing industries. Similarly, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have higher proportions of women engaged in readymade and garment manufacturing units. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown meant job loss and miseries for these women migrants. In Sri Lanka, delays in facilitating the return of these workers from the Export Processing Zones led to a period of uncertainty. But even after transportation was provided, only some of these women went back to their homes and hundreds of them were stuck in hostels without basic facilities. Most of these stranded female workers did not have access to basic healthcare facilities nor could access the government stipend provided because they were temporary “residents”.

Job loss for women migrants means a drastic decline in the remittances to their families back in their native places. It has been widely reported that the proportion of remittances from women migrants abroad are considerably more compared to their male counterparts. These remittances are lifelines for their families back home. In the case of internal women migrants, a larger share of income received by women workers is spent on their family’s food and welfare. So, the first and foremost implication of women’s job loss is the possible reduction in remittances to their families.

In addition, a good chunk of women (especially international women migrants from South Asia) is working as care and domestic workers. In times of pandemic, these women have to work more and in more unsafe conditions, which essentially adds more stress to them.

During lockdowns and periods of restricted movement of migrant workers, women have limited freedom to return home and take independent decisions of their own. To cite an example, though there are many agitations of internal migrants in different parts of India (like Mumbai, Hyderabad, Surat, Delhi-UP border etc.), the participants were mostly male migrants. This shows that women are less visible. The missing women in these places also mean women have less freedom of movement and even for returning to their native places.

In Chapter 3, we have discussed the influence of patriarchal norms in restricting the migration of women from South Asian countries. It is quite likely that there will be more restrictive policies on women’s migration in the post-COVID-19 era, and this will be more prominent in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, where already restrictions are in place on women’s migration. But the pressure to support their families will only increase, leading women to embark on unsafe migration pathways. The risks involved in such a context are already raising the fear of human trafficking.

Migrant women also face issues related to sex and reproductive health rights. It is reported that women are facing increased domestic violence during the pandemic. Parsa (2020) reports that Afghan migrant (and displaced) women, in particular face heightened risks of domestic violence as a result of the intensified tensions in the families due to the loss of daily income as a result of prolonged lockdowns.

Women and children are also facing issues regarding basic healthcare services and minimum nutritional safety. Women’s work burden in households has increased considerably, given their crucial role as caregivers to children, elderly and other family members in the patriarchal societies of South Asia. Lack of social protection (healthcare protection) during pregnancy and childcare stages is an important issue.

There is also mounting evidence to suggest that domestic violence against women (including sexual violence) are on the rise. By now, it has also been widely understood that trafficking, sexual harassment and exploitation of women have also increased considerably during the COVID-19 crisis and this trend is expected to continue in future too. Given all these, social stigma regarding women’s participation in the labour market is expected to deepen further.

Box 6.13: Exploitation of Women Migrants in Bahrain

In Bahrain, on the pretext of coronavirus infection, women migrants such as domestic helps and caregivers were not allowed to go back and were victims of harassment and sexual exploitation.

Source: Infomigrants (2020).

6.7. Inadequate and Improper Government Interventions

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 and the resultant miseries experienced by the migrants strongly suggest the inadequate preparedness of the states in the South Asian countries to quickly contain and control the adverse impacts of the pandemic on migrant workers. In all South Asian states, within a few days of lockdown, the poorest of the poor among migrants were left with no fall back mechanisms to address the income and food insecurities brought in by the pandemic.

The inefficacy of protective labour legislation and social security/labour welfare measures became very evident, as absolute poverty and fear of starvation became a reality within a few days since the first lockdown in most of the South Asian countries. Though certain relief packages were announced by various governments, most of these measures had nothing substantial to strongly support and uplift the most vulnerable segments of migrants. In terms of immediate provision of food security, adequate direct income transfer and quick provision of healthcare facilities etc. almost all governments in South Asia have been faltering considerably from what is adequate and appropriate to effectively combatting the crisis.

None of the South Asian countries had effective social protection measures to specifically address migrant workers' issues and assuring them a modicum amount of social security. The recent announcement of Government of India to set up a Migration Commission needs to be seen in this context.

In governmental interventions also, often differential treatment creeps in. Migrants are not homogenous, and some categories of migrants are relatively better-off or prominent, while certain categories are comparatively more backward and vulnerable. Available evidence suggests that some of the government interventions are essentially more skewed towards the better-off segments of migrants, whereas marginalised sections are largely left out from the benefits of such measures. For example, the Bangladesh government has been more concerned about addressing the issues of migrants working in the garment sector (which is very crucial for the country's economy), whereas the same degree of interest was not there in resolving the problems of workers in other sectors (e.g. in construction and domestic work). Similarly, while most of the countries in South

Asia had arranged for special flights (and at times, ships) for bringing back their overseas migrants, the same concern was not shown to bring back these migrants who crossed the land borders. To cite an example, around mid-May 2020, while India was actively planning to bring back the migrants from the GCC, around 400 Indian workers who were stranded in the Rampal power plant of Bangladesh had to stage a demonstration demanding a safe return to India. There are many such examples from each country of the South Asian region, which suggest the wider prevalence of 'victimisation of the vulnerable most migrants' within the state policies and interventions.

6.8. Concluding Remarks

The COVID-19 crisis and the resultant developments testify that the states in South Asian countries are not adequately equipped to provide the basic income, food and other social security supports to their migrant workers (especially for those who are from the lowest income category). Inefficacy of social security programmes, legislative protection and welfare provision machinery was strikingly evident during these periods. Given this, it is imperative at this juncture to strengthen the national and international measures to support the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Revisiting and strengthening of country-wise initiatives, designing of intra-regional measures and effective adoption and implementation of international guidelines/conventions are important possible steps in this direction.

The governments in South Asia should earmark more resources for ensuring employment and income support to the migrant workers who are affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The increased participation of the people of India in measures like the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MGNREGA) show that what is required is to immediately provide the migrants with work and food. There is a need for many other measures like the declaration of a moratorium for loans, assistance towards re-habilitating, re-skilling and integrating the affected migrants to productive livelihood options and so on.

There is a need for designing comprehensive migrant-friendly disaster risk management policies to fight the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 on migrant workers. Such measures should be based on reliable data on migration streams and migrant population, which is strikingly missing in almost all South Asian countries.

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Conclusions: What is the Way Forward?

Conclusions: What is the Way Forward?

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7.1. Introduction

The previous chapters analysed migration in South Asia, with specific focus on poverty and migration. As is evident, migration is a burning issue for all countries in the region. The questions are many, the analysis is often evident; however, resolutions to the issues raised often defy easy answers. We attempt in this chapter to briefly revisit some of the more important issues related to poverty and migration, and state policies that influence migration in the region. We, therefore, suggest possible resolutions to some of the concerns raised, while highlighting the critical need to address many other issues with no ready answers. The chapter is structured for analytical convenience into three sections: the past, the present situation and the way forward.

7.2. The Past

The three largest countries in terms of population in South Asia—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh—were born out of violent conflicts resulting in large-scale cross-border migration, and leaving permanent scars of hatred and anger. Internal and cross-border violence has not been restricted to only these countries. Pakistan and Afghanistan have seen ongoing tensions between different sects of Muslims and between various political parties. Afghanistan has been a battleground for global superpowers trying to spread their influence in the region, and the terrorist backlash. Tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations in Sri Lanka, Maoist violence in Nepal and the social tensions in Baluchistan and Sindh are other examples of continuing violence from the past to present times. The divisions fomented by this long history of violence do not disappear even when the proximate causes and intensity of conflicts reach a seeming resolution. The memory of loss and divide between communities remain, fostered by narrow parochial interests of religious groups, community organisations and political parties. As per the ranking of the Global Peace Index (2018), South Asia is the second least peaceful region in the world and accounted for an estimated one-fifth of all conflict-related deaths in 2016. The combined defence spending in the region for India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka increased at constant (2005) prices by over 25 per cent, from 54.25 Billion USD in 2009-10 to 67.97 Billion USD in 2014-15 (Mani & Bhattacharya, 2018).

The impact of violence and conflict in the region plays out at different levels. At the fiscal level, increased government spending on defence takes away public expenditure on social security measures. Further, increased militarisation impacts internal democracy. The threat perception of violence often results in clamp down on all forms of democratic dissent, viewed as an anti-state activity. This in turn also adversely impacts ease of migration and the ability of the migrant to access gainful employment and livelihood options.

Civil society peace organisations have in the past highlighted the existence of shared cultural heritage and mutual respect and regard among people of neighbouring countries in South Asia. Representatives of these organisations have highlighted how people to people contact through the free movement of people is the most effective way to combat violence and enmity in the region. Open migration can have both peace and economic dividends for all countries in South Asia. The 'golden era' that conservative politics often harkens back to did not have border controls. Dominant government response to internal and cross-border unrest typically takes the form of increased recourse to police and military apparatus, which only serves to increase regional unrest. The ghost of the past violence refuses to get exorcised in such a political environment. Today, the effects are to be seen in the large numbers of refugees: the Chakmas in India from Bangladesh, the Rohingyas from Myanmar in Bangladesh and India, the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, Sri Lankan Tamils in India.

The development paradigm based on industrial growth followed across the region brought in its wake a trail of destruction and displacement. Economic growth over the past decades had a strong urban bias, resulting in large population shifts from villages and small towns to big cities. Development projects, including large dams, roads and infrastructure, and the growth of the urban sprawl also displaced large sections of the population. The poor bore the brunt of this displacement, being largely excluded from any rehabilitation measures linked to compensation for the property. The landless and propertyless have only their labour and access to common resources as assets; they do not find mention in the accounting books for rehabilitation and compensation. They are forced into indigent migration, joining the large numbers of the urban proletariat, keeping wages down, subsidising development costs and helping create capital accumulation.

Industrialisation meant that the share of agriculture in GDP reduced, therefore, creating an impetus for population shift to the cities. While urban sprawls grew rapidly in all countries in South Asia, the physical infrastructure, including roads, housing, transport and other infrastructure, did not keep pace, condemning the migrant to exist in conditions of greater privation.

The foregoing discussions and analyses in this report set the conditions for the present situation across the countries in South Asia: increasing inequalities, disillusionment with welfare politics, deepening chauvinist and religious divides and growing economic and social insecurity resulting in strengthening patriarchal and communal hold on society within countries, and weakening political and economic cooperation across countries in the region. They laid the preconditions for the decline in fiscal space and the growth of monetarism and market-based policies at the government level.

7.3. The Present

Since the mid-1980s, and accelerating in the 1990s, neoliberalism has spread as the dominant ideology, replacing the welfare economics of countries in South Asia. This spread of neoliberalism was forced on the countries as part of various structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and the IMF. The result has been the drying up of government fiscal intervention and increasing dependence on monetary policies to grow the economy. Economic growth since the nineties has been accompanied by increasing levels of inequalities. While official poverty measures have shown decline across countries in absolute terms, poverty in relative terms has grown, with declining access to government-funded social security measures. The Gini Coefficient measuring income inequalities increased in all countries in South Asia between 2010 and 2017 (SAAPE, 2018).

The decline in state funding was accompanied by increasing dependence on a public-private partnership model in critical sectors of health, education and infrastructure. In India and Sri Lanka, newly introduced insurance-based health care schemes expose the poor to insecurities of private sector health care with an uncertainty of what proportion of the health expenditure would be reimbursed. The public-private partnership model is also entering education, with privatisation removing access to quality education for the poor.

Neoliberal policies disproportionately threaten migrants. The need for stable identity and a lack of adequate portability of welfare entitlements mean that when universal social security provisions are diluted and replaced by targeted schemes in the public-private partnership sector, many migrants are

excluded for prolonged periods while they try to get integrated into the new destinations. State policies like the National Registry of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act in India threaten sections of migrant poor who lack documents showing stable proof of residence, with loss of citizenship and even the possibility of consequent denial of freedom and threat of deportation. The history of violence and hatred that accompanied the formation of the new nation-states in South Asia has also resulted in 'othering' sections of the local populations, for instance, Muslims in India, Hindus in Pakistan and Tamils in Sri Lanka, making them less equal in their own countries. These poor from various discriminated minority communities face the further threat of chauvinism and violence, increasing the incidence of distress migration.

The feminisation of work has meant that large numbers of women are joining the workforce, either in poorly paid factory work in export garment factories, or in informal care and other service sector employment. While the previous dominant pattern of women migrating with marriage continues, today, women are also migrating in search of livelihood. The economic empowerment in most cases does not mean escape from the overarching shadow of patriarchy. Unsafe cities, poor transport, low wages and harsh working conditions all conspire to ensure that the women workers have very little independence. Women are also migrating in large numbers abroad, for instance as nurses and care workers, from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, to the GCC countries. There have been numerous instances of women workers facing harsh and exploitative conditions in the destination countries, often employed in very different positions from what was promised by unscrupulous labour contractors. The neoliberal state response is typically to create stricter restrictions on legal emigration, forcing women to take recourse to undocumented routes, in turn increasing their vulnerability. These restrictions are lifted after a period of hiatus to continue business as usual. The root cause of the violence faced by women, the lack of rights and protection in destination countries is not addressed in any meaningful way. After all, the need to maintain a healthy balance of foreign currency reserves cannot allow the state to stop the export of the one commodity it has in abundance – cheap labour.

The rapidly growing effects of climate change serve to accentuate economic and social impacts on society within the region. The Global Climate Risk Index for 2017 (Eckstein et al., 2019) had Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh from South Asia among the top ten most affected countries globally. Climate change is both a driver of migration, pushing people to seek new places to settle in and search new livelihood options, and increasing the level of deprivation for the poorest

among the climate-induced migrants. The increasing severity and impact of climate-induced events will serve to push progressively larger sections of the population as migrants, pushing against the restrictions placed on them by state and national boundaries and restrictive border policies. Climatic crises will serve to create an increasing number of climate migrants and refugees on the one hand, and increase the immiseration of the poor, particularly the poorest among the migrants, on the other. It will put further strain on democratic institutions in the region.

7.4. The Way Forward

The primary drivers of migration are poverty, declining livelihood and employment opportunities and increasing violence targeting specific vulnerable communities. Strong fiscal measures are required to tackle the root causes while also ensuring migration destinations are safe for migrants, and they are ensured minimum living and working standards. Given the spread of neoliberal ideology in governance, pushing for positive government intervention is not easy.

It is evident from the various Country Reports that legislation is weak and actual regulation inadequate to address issues of migration, both within nations and across national borders. While some regulatory measures like the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act in India seek to address issues of migrant workers, there has been a failure of both regulative intent and practice in implementing provisions of such measures. There has also been a failure in the trade union movement to adequately address the need to organise migrant workers and to bring their issues to the centre stage of collective bargaining at local and national levels. This is not an easy task, given the extreme vulnerability and often footloose nature of much of migrant employment.

Both Sri Lanka and Nepal had regulatory restrictions placed on female migration in response to specific incidences of violation of rights of migrants abroad. However, the legislations were knee-jerk reactions to incidents, and had clear patriarchal overtones. They did not address the root causes of poverty and lack of employment opportunities that forced women to decide to migrate; therefore, the regulatory measures only succeeded in pushing migration underground, increasing costs and decreasing regulatory oversight. Strong regulatory measures are essential to ensure that migration is safe, and workers are ensured their contractual dues. Here again, neoliberalism at home and international hardening of borders against migration of the poor make progressive legislation an arduous task. The first step would probably have to be at the regional level, with the demand to make cross-border travel simple. Today, there are very few

instances for restriction-free travel, as in the case of travel between Nepal and India.

The revival of regional organisations like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) would go a long way in improving regional cooperation and even help in negotiating with common destination regions like the GCC countries for better regulation of migration. The big stumbling block to SAARC is the enmity between India and Pakistan. Civil society organisations like the India-Pakistan People to People Forum have for decades been pursuing a peace agenda and highlighting the bonhomie that exists between common people. Such initiatives need to be strengthened.

The enmity between countries, fuelled by majoritarian and neoliberal politics, denies free movement of people and trade within the region. Soft borders can provide substantial economic and peace dividends within South Asia. Peaceful relations would benefit directly in reducing security spending, freeing funds for social sector spending by the government. Further, the potential for productive employment of a large and young population would give the region a huge advantage for generating economic growth if the context of peaceful relations existed. This is an area where people's pressure, built through civil society organisation efforts and campaign can play a continuing and consistent role.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added an additional critical dimension to the migrant issue. It serves to hasten and deepen existing social and economic fault lines in society. Migrant workers in congested cities find themselves no longer wanted, and forced back to the destinations from where they had been forced out because of economic deprivation. The pandemic has reversed the rural to urban migration route in most South Asian countries. This will only exacerbate the already significant rural-urban economic divide. Further, the loss of livelihood of the migrants means a loss in remittance income, while adding the number of dependants in the migrant family. Women bear an extra brunt in the crisis, given they are primary caregivers in most homes. The role of the caregiver in a pandemic has health consequences. The increasing tensions at home often find an outlet in increased domestic violence. The migrants remaining in cities are faced with increased xenophobia from a population dealing with the ills of an already failing economy and rising inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic keeps people apart, forcing social distancing, and weakens democratic struggles. It emboldens authoritarian regimes to push their oppressive agendas with impunity. There has been a number of significant anti-labour legislation made in this period in South Asian countries. They have largely failed in addressing issues of migrants, whether dealing

with immediate sustenance, the revival of livelihood options, or safety in the face of the pandemic.

The relevance of peoples' organisations becomes even more significant in this context. The agenda before them is enormous. There is a need for information sharing across local areas and national boundaries. Information sharing should include sharing of knowledge on laws and policies, anarchist and syndicalism experiments of mutual aid among the poor, including migrant communities, protests and organisation, and information on regional and cross-border cooperation between social organisations. The information has to reach the common people, in local languages and idioms easily understood at the grass roots levels. There is a need to help keep alive the spark of dissent in society.

All these are not easy tasks. They are made more difficult in an environment vitiated by social unrest; in a situation where neoliberal regimes do not tolerate

dissent; at a time when liberal funding for social action is more difficult to access, both because funding sources are fewer and state laws make it difficult to receive funds. In these circumstances, keeping organisational activity alive requires effort and persistence. This could also be a boon, making civil society organisations more dependent on local support, and therefore more accountable to the constituencies they work with.

These are dark and difficult times. However, the times can generate their own camaraderie and solidarity, their own new opportunities.

In the dark times

Will there also be singing?

Yes, there will also be singing.

About the dark times.

-Bertolt Brecht

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Annexures

Annexure

1

Abridged Versions of Country Reports

1.1 Afghanistan

Migratory Patterns and Livelihood in Afghanistan: Structural Drivers and Impacts

Mirwais Parsa

1. Introduction

Migration has been an important characteristic of human societies throughout world history. Depending on how migratory flows are regulated, migration can have positive impacts on the growth and prosperity of the nations of source and destination through cultural, economic, and social exchanges, or it can leave adverse effects of rising unemployment, population growth, insecurity, and brain drain. According to prominent theories of the determinants of migration, income maximization, investment in human capital, and wage and employment differential across countries are the primary drivers of migratory flows. The income maximization theory maintains that the individuals' and families' rational cost-benefit calculation for income maximization is the main determinant of migration (Harris & Todaro, 1970). According to the human capital theory of migration, people incur the cost of migrating to a place where they are better off in terms of income and living standards (Massey et al., 1993). The wage and employment differential theory understands the probability of wage and employment differential between the origin and destination countries as the primary cause of cross-border movements (Todaro, 1969). Corresponding to the basic neo-classical theories is the push-pull model of migration developed by Lee (1966). According to the push and pull model, the broader sets of negative and positive factors in the origins and destinations determine people's migratory movements (Loschmann & Siegel, 2014).

These theories, however, provide a uniform and reductionist explanation for the drivers of migration and fail to explain the fundamental causes of migratory flows, particularly in the context of developing countries. In this chapter, building on the push-pull model of migration, I would try to develop a more nuanced account of the status, intensity, and drivers of migration in Afghanistan and analyze its interplay with other developmental indicators, particularly poverty

and inequality. The rest of the chapter is organized as the following: Section 2 discusses the drivers of migration in Afghanistan. Section 3 elaborates on the gender aspect of migration in Afghanistan. Section 4 analyses the state's policy responses to the interlinked challenges of migration, unemployment, and rising poverty, and Section 5 concludes the chapter.

2. Drivers of Migration in Afghanistan

The spectrum of movements of Afghans runs from voluntary to forced migration caused by a number of push and pull factors. Broadly, the drivers of migration in Afghanistan can be divided into two categories. One, the fundamental causes that include the structural and environmental factors such as globalization, privatization, proxy wars and climate change, which are all linked to the neoliberal system and power paradigm in one or the other way. Two, the proximate causes, such as conflict, economic recessions, unemployment, poverty, political struggles, resource degradation, and natural hazards that are driven by the fundamental drivers. The scope of this study would be limited to the discussion and analysis of the proximate causes.

2.1. Forced Migration

2.1.1. Violence and Conflict

Violence and conflicts are understood as the key factors causing mass migration and displacement in Afghanistan. Concisely, almost every humanitarian crisis in the country, such as the elevated rates of disease, malnutrition, poverty, food insecurity, forced displacements, premature deaths, and malnutrition, are associated with the current war. OCHA's displacement tracking system data indicates that 349,794 individuals were displaced by conflict in Afghanistan in 2018, making up 57.08% of the total internally displaced persons in that year²⁷. The total number of violence-related asylum claims filed by Afghanistan citizens

²⁷Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afghanistan_weekly_field_report_01_january_-_07_january_2019.pdf.

in 80 countries in 2017 was 124,900, which was the highest number of asylum claims in the world in 2017²⁸. The perpetuating conflict has forced people to adopt domestic and cross-border mobility as the primary survival strategy despite enormous risk and cost associated with the involuntary and illegal emigrations.

2.1.2. Poverty and Unemployment

The impact of migration on poverty, depending on the nature and drivers of migration, can be different. Migration can contribute to the economy of the family and the nations if it is voluntary — in search of better employment opportunities in which case remittance flows would accompany it. But if migration is involuntary, it is thought to worsen the intensity of poverty and vulnerability of the individuals and households. In Afghanistan, due to the forced nature of migratory movements, the second effect prevails. Over the past five decades of the on-going war, and the rise and demise of numerous ideological and non-ideological regimes, Afghanistan has become one of the poorest nations of the world. Today, the high levels of poverty, inequality, unemployment, and illegal migrations affect the daily life of an absolute majority of the Afghans (Table 1). According to Afghanistan's central statistic organization, poverty increased from 36% in 2007–08 to 54.5% in 2016–17, and unemployment rose from 7.1% in 2007–08 to 23.9% in 2016–17. Household survey data shows that the deterioration of the economic condition in Afghanistan since 2014 has affected the top income bracket slightly, but it has pushed a significant portion of the population that was in the middle-income group in 2013–14, below the poverty line since then (see Figures 1 and 2).

The economy of Afghanistan had been growing at an average rate of 7.09% over the period 2003–2017. But the growth has benefited the already better-off section of the society, and it has widened the gap between the rich and poor. With the yearly population growth rate of about 3%, based on the recent data, the current economic growth rate and the projected growth rate for the upcoming years are way below the level required to create jobs for the growing labor force in the country. More than 400,000 people out of a birth cohort of 800,000 are entering the labor market every year. Not only the massive magnitude of unemployment in the country is a serious issue, but the quality of jobs is also a significant challenge. A recent report of the central statistic organization of Afghanistan has classified 80% of all current jobs in the country as vulnerable employment, involving job insecurity and poor working conditions. Only 13% of the employed population are considered to possess decent jobs (CSO, 2018).

2.1.3. Natural Disasters

Besides the security tensions, frequent natural hazards, such as floods, avalanches, earthquakes, and drought, cause massive waves of internal displacement and emigration in Afghanistan every year. According to OCHA's data, 263,000 individuals were displaced in 2018 due to natural hazards, making up 42.91% of total internally displaced individuals in 2018¹ (see Figures 3 and 4). The intensity of drought and other frequent natural hazards at times are more severe that they force families to perpetrate to the negative coping mechanisms of child-selling and child-marriages. Furthermore, the effects of climate change, apparent through extreme levels of high and low temperatures in the summer and winter, and the recurrent natural hazards such floods, droughts, land degradation and water shortages in Afghanistan, threaten the lives of around 80% of the country's population who are solely dependent on natural resources and agriculture products as the primary sources of livelihood. Also, the climate-induced natural hazards have been causing increasing waves of the displacement of the disaster-affected households.

2.2. Voluntary Migration and Urbanisation

Although the majority of Afghan migrants, refugees, and internally displaced individuals are forced to move internally and across borders, there are people whose decision to migrate is voluntary – driven by desires for upward mobility in terms of socio-economic status, i.e., 'migration of better offs for betterment.' This category of Afghan migrants includes the people who are relatively resource-rich and possessing better human capital. People's cultural, tribal, and family links across the borders, particularly between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries of Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and recently Europe and Australia, have, over time, developed the extensive networks and corridors of movements. Families with one or more members in other countries, over time, figuring out the various mechanisms, build wider networks for facilitating the movements of the rest of the family members. Urbanization and relatively better opportunities in cities have also increased the prospect of rural to urban migration in Afghanistan over the last decade.

2.3. Other Drivers of Migration

2.3.1. Landlessness and Rural Distress

The core of rural distress in Afghanistan lies in the agriculture sector. The majority of Afghan people living in rural areas are dependent on agriculture produces as their primary sources of livelihood. Limited land and agricultural asset possessions of the households and depletion of natural resources, on the one hand, and lack of rainfall and agricultural water, on the other

²⁸UNHCR, 2018. Global trends: forced displacement in 2017, pp. 42.

hand, have increased the massive exodus of the people from the rural to the urban centers.

Moreover, a lack of access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and other amenities in the countryside pushes thousands of families to urban centers every year. Reportedly, between January and November 2018, around 4,000 hours of healthcare delivery have been lost, and 335,000 consultations missed because of forced closure and destruction of healthcare centers in the countryside²⁹. During those 11 months, 1,150 schools had been closed across Afghanistan, depriving some 545,000 students of learning opportunities³⁰. The push factors such as massive deprivations, disguised unemployment, and poverty in rural areas, and the pull factor in the cities encourage people to move to urban centers, where they can have access to relatively better public services and the labor market. As a result of the vast rural to urban displacement over recent years, cities like Kabul and Herat are now extremely over-populated, causing congestion of the labor market, resource crunch, and job insecurity.

2.3.2. Ethnic and Tribal Rivalries

Internal displacement in Afghanistan is also historically linked to ethnic and tribal rivalries, family and group animosity, and unhealthy competitions over political power and economic resources. Discriminations of various forms exercised by the power holders have caused political and economic deprivation of minorities. Historically, the Pashtun-led government in Afghanistan has extensively applied the policy of massive land grabbing from the people of Northern and Western Afghanistan and its redistribution to Pashtuns of the South and East. The huge systemic prejudices and exploitations by the state and the dominant de facto power holders have been driven waves of forced migration and displacement of minority groups over the years. The exclusive and exploitative nature of the governments was, perhaps, the main reasons for the rise of many ideological parties during 1950, the 60s, and later on, all with the motto of justice and equality.

3. Women and Migration

Historically, the stereotypical image of migration in Afghanistan has been the male, and female migrants are seen as tied-up movers, not independent agents of migration. Women in Afghanistan are generally exposed to higher financial and decision-making restrictions that pose drastic obstacles to their freedom of movement (Saidi, 2017). Based on the religious and cultural norms of Afghan society, women's migrations are accompanied by at least one male person from their close family members as the guardian. According

to a survey³¹, 76.6% of Afghan women migrants are those who traveled with a close or extended family member, only 12.3% of the female migrants who are mostly young educated women had moved alone.

While labor migration is found to be an important cause for men's migration in Afghanistan, it is not a significant driver of migration of Afghan women. Data indicates that about 19% of Afghan female migrants have migrated to join their family elsewhere, and another 14.1% have migrated for marriage. However, female's migration for work has been remarkably insignificant (CSO 2018, p. 42). One probable reason for this can be the patriarchal nature of Afghan societies, where stereotypically women are seen mostly as housewives, not outside workers.

4. State, Poverty and Migration

Based on the prescriptions of the Washington-based neoliberal anchors, the government of Afghanistan formally adopted a system of the free-market economy through the 2004 constitution of Afghanistan. The immediate post-Taliban state of affairs in the country, in its worst-case scenario, resembled an institutional vacuum state of affairs and, in the best-case scenario, a country with the few institutions driven by a fundamental interpretation of Islam, which were in immense discontent with the neoliberal values. In such a scene, Afghanistan's transition to the free-market economy was too hasty to reconcile with the local realities and people's perceptions. As a result, despite the pledge of billions of dollars and developmental interventions of hundreds of national and international humanitarian organizations and donor countries, very little has been achieved in terms of economic progress. Institutional clashes, systemic corruption, the global and regional proxy wars and the failure of the free-market system to tackle increasing poverty, inequality, and unemployment have pushed people to margins and directly and indirectly, led to the forced migration and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Afghans over the last decade.

Immediately after the adaptation to the neoliberal system, the government of Afghanistan began the process of privatization of state-owned enterprises in 2005. Since then, the contribution of the state in economic activities overly declined, and the public enterprises that once reportedly could generate up to 60% of the government revenues in the 1950s and 1960s were transferred to the hands of the crippling private sector of the economy. Privatization and unfettered open economy in Afghanistan facilitated the looting of the public resources by the few private hands and national and international mafia groups. Proper social security measures and importantly the

²⁹OCHA, 2018. 2019 Afghanistan Humanitarian needs overview, p. 7.

³⁰OCHA, 2018. 2019 Afghanistan Humanitarian needs overview, p. 16.

³¹Danish Refugee council, 2017. Monthly Migration Movements, p. 1.

government's presence in the market and economic spheres are essential in conflict-affected countries like Afghanistan, where weak institutions, insecurity, and uncertainty do not allow the private sector to prosper. State-owned enterprises in Afghanistan, which are being drastically uprooted, could have been re-operationalized and used as the policy tools in the hands of the state to create sustainable jobs and combat the surging poverty in the country.

While the minimum wage for the permanent government workers in Afghanistan is Afs 6,000 a month (less than \$80), for the workers in the private sector, there is no prescribed minimum level of wage. A large part of the labor force in the private and informal sector works for longer than 40 hours per week, under the terrible work conditions. Despite the persistence of migration and displacement as a severe challenge in Afghanistan, the government's policy measures to meet the growing challenge have been inadequate. Overall, the immense vulnerability of the people and the continuous failure of the political and economic systems to maintain political stability and tackle economic challenges in Afghanistan have dragged more than half of the population of the country below the poverty line and obliged millions of people to look for risky and illegal cross border movements as a coping mechanism against a continued crisis.

5. Conclusion

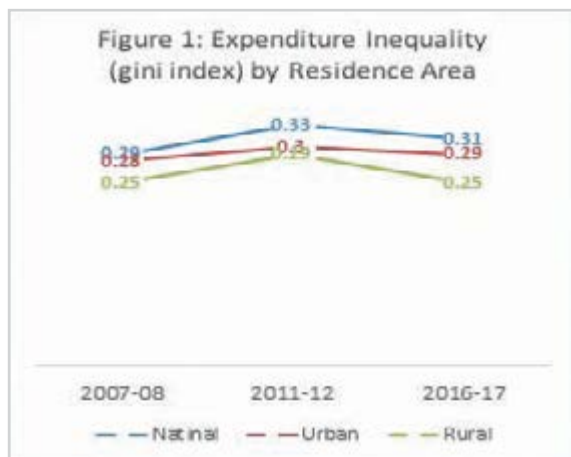
Migration has been an important phenomenon throughout the history of modern Afghanistan. The recent history of the country is evident in at least four waves of massive emigration and internal displacements. The first wave was during the oil boom of the 1970s in the Middle East that attracted a significant number of unskilled and semi-skilled Afghan workers. The second wave that is characterized as forced migration happened with the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan in 1979. Some six million Afghans were forced to flee their homes after this invasion. The third wave was during the civil war and the brutal regime of the Taliban in the 1990s that led to the forced migration of approximately one million individuals from Afghanistan. The fourth phase of migration is in the post-2001 era, caused by insecurity and the on-going war on terror. (Migration rates for Afghanistan across these phases are presented in figure 5).

The proximate drivers of migration in Afghanistan are poverty and unemployment, conflict and insecurity, political instability, resource degradation, and natural hazards. However, on a broader picture, structural and environmental factors such as globalization, proxy wars, climate change, and institutional failures to tackle the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan have been the fundamental drivers of migration and displacement in the country (see figure 6).

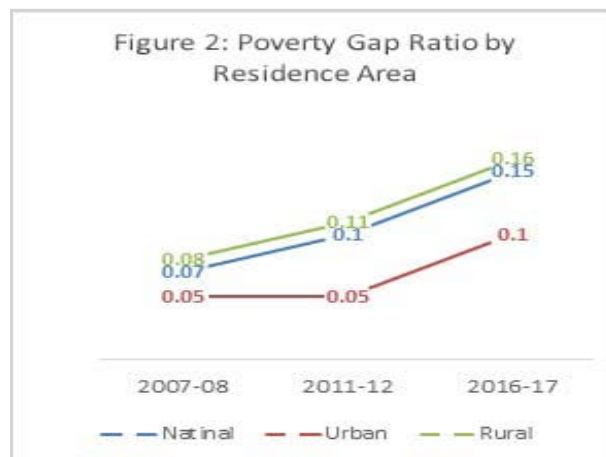
Table 1: The Number of Emigrants, IDPs and Repatriated Citizens of Afghanistan as of 19/11/2018

Country of Destination	Pakistan	Iran	Europe	Saudi Arabia and the UAE	Turkey	USA and Australia	Total
migrants and Refugees	1,947,044	2,160,000	487,399	391,433	151,914	390,000	5,527,790
Returnees (2001 – April/2018)							7169753
Internally displaced							1,333,000

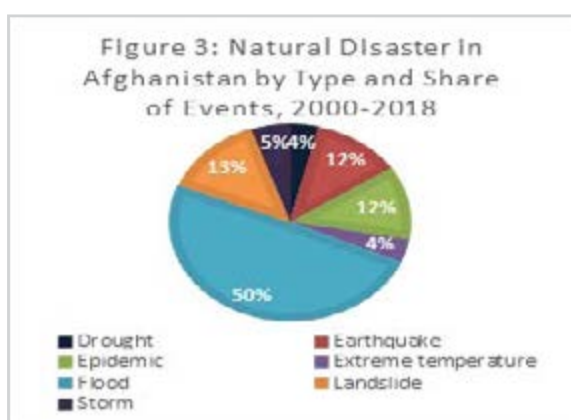
Source: Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations, Afghanistan.



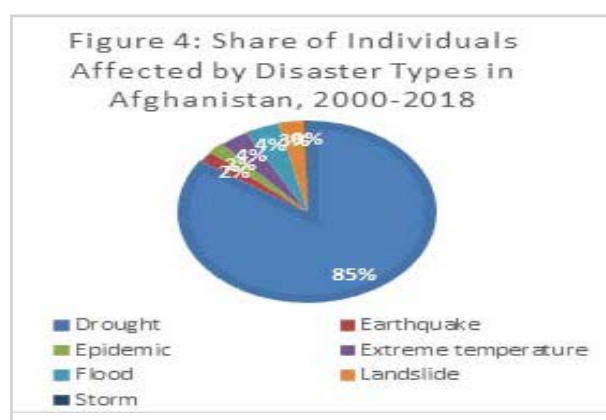
Source: ALCS 2016–17.



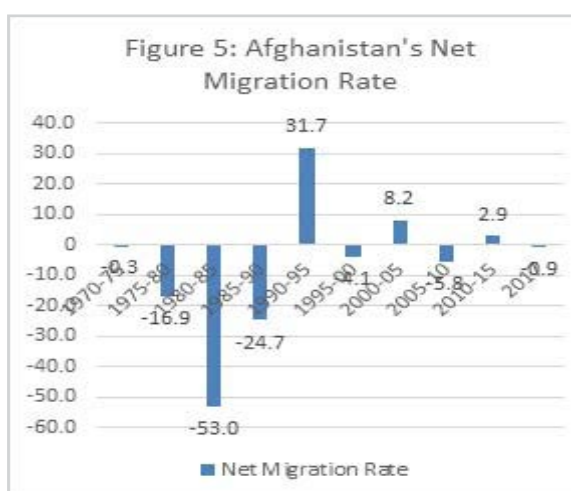
Source: ALCS 2016–17.



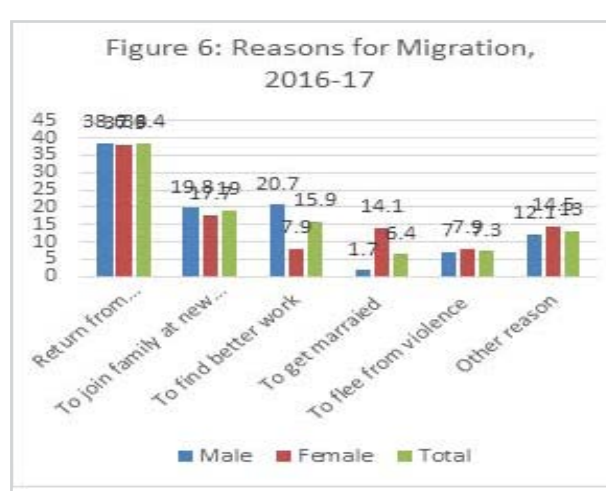
Source: EM-DAT Database.



Source: EM-DAT Database.



Source: ALCS 2016–17.



Source: UN DESA (2017).

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1.2 Bangladesh

The Vulnerable: A Report on Migrants in Bangladesh

AKM Mustaque Ali

1. Introduction

Migration fundamentally challenges our understanding of development. While the elites have a choice in their migration, for the poor, migration the search for survival is often forced, controlled and restricted. The issue of agency becomes another critical dimension in the politics of migration. This is particularly so when development itself becomes the cause for the poor being forced to search new avenues for survival. The present report is intended to seek and understand growth, inequality and poverty from the perspective of the most vulnerable sections – the migrants. It is intended to look at the underpinnings of the economic crisis in rural areas, which are the cause of rural to urban migration of the poor.

The gap between the rich and the poor is perpetuating and getting bigger. Income inequality in Bangladesh has widened further despite a decline in the rate of poverty. Poverty level dropped to 24.3 per cent in 2016 from 31.5 per cent that of 2010 but the Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality within a country's population, increased to 0.483 in 2016 from 0.458 that of 2010. This indicates that the economic growth over the last three decades in Bangladesh has largely benefitted the very rich, and as a consequence, incomes of the rich have been rising at a much faster rate than that of the poor. The share of the bottom 20 per cent has decreased between 2000 and 2010 both at the national level and in rural areas.

2. Internal Migration

A study postulated that the number of individuals engaging in internal migration is estimated to be three times larger than that in international migration.³² Internal migration is generally linked

to population pressure, adverse person to land ratio, landlessness, poverty, natural calamities, law and order, lack of social and cultural spaces, job opportunities and higher wages. Migration experts have clustered drivers of migration into two factors: (1) "push" factors that force people to leave villages in the wake of economic stagnation or crisis; and (2) "pull" factors that lure people to leave home in the face of opportunities created by economic growth.

	Pull Factors				Push Factors			Others
	Marriage	Education	Employment/ Business	In Search of Work	Natural Calamity	Family Quarrel	Tortured/ Deserted by Spouse	
Male	10.46	6.9	30.37	21.86	3.19	1.52	0.16	25.53
Female	56.35	3.70	7.44	7.18	1.48	1.03	0.20	22.64
Total	66.81	10.6	37.81	21.86	4.67	2.55	0.36	48.17

Dhaka division, being the capital city, is the highest migration destination area in the country. About 49.21 per cent and 34.32 per cent migrants in Dhaka are from Rangpur and Chittagong divisions, respectively. The migration to Dhaka division is not a strange phenomenon because the concentration of economic and political institutions in Dhaka attracts migrants from other regions.

3. External Migration

Bangladesh has emerged as a major exporter of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour but most of the export to more than 22 countries is unskilled labour. The number of Bangladeshi nationals migrating to different countries around the world had seen a 34.15 per cent increase in 2017.

The composition of Bangladeshi migrant workers is dominated by male. Among the total migrants, 96 per cent are male while the amount of female is only 4 per cent. Gender Composition of migrant workers is illustrated in the following table.

Gender	Chittagong	Dhaka	Khulna	Rajshahi	Rangpur	Sylhet	Barishal
Male	95.3	98.3	95.6	94.0	98.3	97.5	96.1
Female	4.7	1.7	4.4	6.0	1.7	2.6	3.9

³²Tasneem Siddiqui, Situation Analysis of Migration Context and Policy Framework in Bangladesh, IOM, 2015.

Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Singapore are the top destination countries of Bangladeshi migrant workers. Of the total stock of Bangladeshi migrant workers, 28.56 per cent are currently working in Saudi Arabia, 25.24 per cent in the United Arab Emirates, 10.52 per cent in Oman, 7.68 per cent in Malaysia and 5.98 per cent in Singapore. The total number of migrant workers has been increasing in the last two decades. According to the 2017 data of BBS, BMET, the total number of Bangladeshi migrant workers is around 9.25 million.

3.1. Remittance

In 2016, the external migrants remitted more than USD15 billion. In 2015, the figure was USD 14.94 billion. Since 2013, Bangladesh has been the seventh-largest remittance-receiving country of the world. Similar to 2015, in 2016 Saudi Arabia was the highest remittance sending country for Bangladesh (21.49 per cent). It is followed by the UAE (18.14 per cent) and the US (16.11 per cent). Although to date the highest amount of remittances is sent from Saudi Arabia, its total share is falling each year. In earlier years, 50 per cent of the total remittance received was from Saudi Arabia. Bangladesh experienced a substantial increase in remittance flow from Malaysia in 2015 compared to the previous year. A total of 6.8 per cent remittances were received from Kuwait in 2015, another 6 per cent from Oman, 2.1 per cent from Qatar and 2.67 per cent from Singapore.³³

3.2. Rohingya: Refugee or Displaced People?

For decades, this ethnic minority has suffered legal and social discrimination. While there are historical economic relations with the Buddhist Rakhine community, there are also long-standing tensions between the two groups. The 1982 Citizenship Law stripped the Rohingya of their citizenship and even the right to self-identify. The Rohingya are also subject to many restrictions in day-to-day life: they are banned from travelling without authorisation and prohibited from working outside their villages, they cannot marry without permission and, due to movement restrictions, and they lack sufficient access to livelihood opportunities, medical care and education. On 9 October 2016, the Myanmar army triggered a series of violent operations that saw more than 87,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh in search of refuge. The latest clashes come less than one year after a previous assault by insurgents on three border guard posts. In August 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya fled across the border into Bangladesh. During the previous year, some 87,000 people had already fled after the October 2016 security incidents.

According to the Needs and Population Monitoring Report, around 1 million Rohingyas are now living in various camps in Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. Initially, the Government of Bangladesh had allocated 2,000 acres adjacent to an existing camp where about 250,000 people could be accommodated. Meanwhile, most of the new arrivals are settling in existing camps which become severely overcrowded, and there is an immense pressure on resources and services that were made available. There are 24 refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, which are home around 902,395 Rohingya refugees. The "mega-camp" of Kutupalong and Balukhali in Ukhyia Upazila is the world's largest refugee camp and houses 622,850 Rohingya. The demographic distribution of Rohingyas living in Bangladesh shows that 42 per cent of the population is adult, 48 per cent is male and 52 per cent is female. According to the UNICEF, children make up approximately 55 per cent of the total Rohingyas living in different parts of the camp.

The Bangladesh government does not acknowledge Rohingyas as refugees; they are identified as "forcibly displaced nationals from Myanmar". By calling Rohingyas refugee, the GoB has to commit to various conventions of the UN and also acknowledge the problem as a long-term agenda. It must oblige Article 17 of the "Refugee Convention, 1951" which binds the contracting states to provide wage-earning employments to the refugees, and under Article 3 of "Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948" has to ensure the security of a person irrespective of identity. Moreover, by hosting the Rohingya community under pretext of "forcibly displaced nationals from Myanmar", gives Bangladesh leverage to restrict their freedom of movement and to keep them highly monitored inside the camps.

4. Drivers behind Migration

4.1. Unemployment

The current state of the economy of Bangladesh elucidates that economic growth is not a guarantee in cutting down the rate of unemployment. Bangladesh is in a state of jobless growth. Between 2013 and 2015–16, the share of industry and manufacturing in employment declined for the first time in the country and employment generation was negative in agriculture as well as employment generation in the industry was minuscule, although there was a large employment generation in the services sector.

4.2. Violence and Conflict

An overwhelming majority of Bangladeshis are Muslims (88.6 per cent), followed by Hindus (10.7 per cent) and others (0.7 per cent). Attacks on minority communities,

³³<https://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/25th-anniversary-special-part-5/international-labour-migration-212671>

especially on Hindus, are silently happening in Bangladesh, not only for religious motives but also to grab their land, assets and businesses. Past military regime and governments backed by fundamentalist parties considered the Hindus as a vote bank for the oppositions and inflicted structural violence onto them for perpetuating their loyalty. Due to inhumane treatment, the outlook of political elites and the constant feeling of insecurity forced a great number of Hindus cross the border and migrate to India legally and illegally.

Out of 160 million of the country's population, 3 million belong to 45 small ethnic groups. The majority of them are Buddhists and animists, while about half the country's 500,000 Christians also come from indigenous communities. These communities have long complained of systematic grabbing of their land by using fake documents or resorting to acts of violence. Over the past four decades, more than 140 indigenous people have been killed, many women raped and some 10,000 forced to migrate because of land disputes.

4.3. Land and Resource Grabbing

Bangladesh has a long history of inequitable access to land. Bangladesh is a land-scarce country where per capita cultivated land is only 12.5 decimals. It is found that 89 per cent of landowners have less than 2.5 acres of land, 10 per cent between 2.5 and 7.5 acres and 1 per cent more than 7.5 acres. Despite land reforms, 39 per cent of the households own less than 0.5 acres (USAID, 2010). The number of landless households is growing at a fast pace; 13 per cent of rural households in Bangladesh own absolutely no type of land including for housing. The average farm size is therefore very small, and most of the landless and near landless people fall into the poor or the extreme poor category. According to the data of Planning Commission, every year over 80 thousand hectares of agricultural land (nearly one per cent of the total agricultural land) is being converted to non-agricultural uses.³⁴

The land transferred to non-agriculture usages is derived mainly from the land-poor (up to 2.49 acres), constituting 88 per cent of total farm holdings. The next two important uses are in the construction of roads and business establishments, covering 10 and 8 per cent, respectively. The market economy also defines land as a convertible commodity which has given rise to thousands of unregulated real estate companies who are building apartments for urban elites and middle-class. More than 55 per cent of the converted land is used in housing, predominantly in metro villages (60 per cent).

4.3.1. Land and Resource Grabbing for the Sake of Development

Bangladesh is under the grip of neoliberal growth model for development. Industrialisation is considered as the panacea of higher growth. To accelerate the pace of industrialisation of the country, the government announced the 'National Industrial Policy-2016' where land is considered as an input for industrialisation and backward linkage. Currently, there is no cohesive resettlement policy in effect. It is estimated that an average 20,000 to 30,000 people are affected every year by infrastructure development projects in Bangladesh. Sometimes land acquisition takes place in the name of establishing Export Processing Zones. Around 30,000 hectares of land has been grabbed by the state for establishing Special Economic Zones (SEPZ).³⁵

4.4. Climate Change and Natural Disaster

Bangladesh being a disaster-prone country has suffered much in recent years from climate change-induced extreme events like erosion, cyclones and storm surges. These events have forced a huge number of people to migrate from their homesteads to other places. The affected people generally migrate to nearby towns and cities, and many never go back. The Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna river basin is one of the most flood-prone areas in the world. Official data shows that the devastating 1998 flood alone caused 1,100 deaths and rendered 30 million people homeless. About 350,000 people migrated internally after Cyclone Aila hit. An estimation shows that around 13 million people within Bangladesh are likely to be displaced by 2050 due to climate change, eventually migrating to Dhaka and other big cities, where climate migrants are expected to outnumber internal migrants.³⁶

According to a World Bank report, the bank's USD 400 million Coastal Embankment Improvement Project, intended to rehabilitate 600 km of embankments in 17 polders in six coastal districts—Bagerhat, Khulna, Satkhira, Barguna, Patuakhali and Pirojpur—to protect 760,000 people living within the polder boundaries throughout 2013–20, is expected to displace more than 6,200 households physically or economically, destroy more than 2,000 businesses, damage 1,315 agricultural plots and force the closure of 184 educational and religious buildings.

4.5. Urbanisation

Between 1991 and 2010, an improbable decline has been observed regarding the number of rural poor in Bangladesh. The total number of rural poor decreased from 55 million to 46 million in this period, while the number of urban poor rose from 6 million to 8 million.

³⁴Planning Commission, 2009.

³⁵Special Economic Zone: Unlocking the Comparative Advantage of Bangladesh.

³⁶<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2018/11/19/60-of-bangladesh-urban-population-in-metropolitan-cities>.

Among the South Asian countries, Bangladesh has experienced the fastest increase in urbanisation with the urban population exploding by 5 per cent annually. From 1960 to 2010, 60 per cent of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was contributed by the cities of Bangladesh. It is important to mention that Dhaka, the capital city, alone is contributing around two-fifth of the share.³⁷

At present, around three-quarters of the new migrants are living in the thousands of slums across the cities. According to the World Bank data, around 2.2 million people currently live in the urban slums across the country. This is the official figure; the unofficial figure is much higher.

4.6. Rural Distress

It is estimated that 47 million people, almost a third of the total population, live below the poverty line and a significant proportion of them live in extreme poverty. The poverty rate is higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.³⁸ The structural changes in the rural economy resulting from the increased commercialisation of the agriculture sector generated widespread rural poverty. Along with structural adjustments and modernisation of agriculture, the changing climate is playing a significant role in rural displacement in Bangladesh. Environmental disasters and vulnerabilities due to climate change force millions of rural poor out from their land. In recent decades, the rural poor living in the coastal areas were frequently affected by natural disasters like cyclones. A huge number of poor people who used to work in their rural land became the new migrants in the cities. They have chosen migration as a strategy to escape from poverty and vulnerabilities. As a livelihood strategy, migration has come into the forefront of academic and policy discussions. The neoliberal migration theorists consider migration as “essential, inevitable and potentially beneficial component of the economic and social life of every state and every region”. As evidence, they show how remittances from abroad have played a pivotal role in poverty eradication and domestic resource mobilisation of recipient countries. They regard migration as an integral component of a continuous process of capitalist development and propagates that migration plays an important role in promoting development and poverty reduction in the countries.

5. Women and Migration

5.1. Internal Migration

In the metropolises and adjacent suburbs, burgeoning manufacturing and construction industries are absorbing female migrants as a cheap labourer. The

RMG sector, which is contributing around 76 per cent to the total export earnings, employs 4.2 million workers of which 60.8 per cent are female. Among these female workers, around 50 per cent are from rural areas and remote villages. An estimate from a recent survey in rural areas shows that females account for 10 per cent of the total migrants competing for wage labour outside (not for living with family) and about two-thirds of those female migrants go to another district, 27 per cent to the same district and 8.0 per cent abroad – usually to the Middle East and Gulf countries.³⁹

Female single, unmarried or divorced migrants are the poorest. Eighty (80) per cent of them belong to functionally landless households (owning up to 0.20 ha); about 70 per cent of them were forced to leave home for employment (push factors) as against 30 per cent for better income (pull factors). Two-thirds are destined for services (e.g. readymade garments) and one-fifths for housework. Most of them are aged below 25, roughly 20 per cent aged below 18, about 60 per cent of them read up to primary and 20 per cent are secondary dropouts.⁴⁰

Regarding the gender wage gap, using LFS 2005–06 data a study suggests that gender variation exists in the monthly income distribution of salaried workers in Bangladesh. At the national level, the highest percentage of salaried workers was in the income group of Tk. 3,000 to 12,499, which covered 78.3 per cent of total salaried. Among them, 79.3 per cent were male – 6.3 per cent more than the female (73.0 per cent).⁴¹ According to a 2010 survey, the income group Tk. 10,000–12,499 covered 21 per cent of salaried workers. In the same year, at the national level, the highest percentage of male salaried workers was 21.9 per cent in the group of Tk. 10,000–12,499 and 17 per cent female were in the same income range. Within the income range of Tk. 3,000–12,499, the male (79.3 per cent) are more concentrated than the female (73.0 per cent).

5.2. External Migration

In 2014, female participation in international migration increased rapidly and stood at 18 per cent of total migrants. The participation of women in short-term international labour market used to be very low, with less than 5 per cent of the total flow up to 2011.⁴²

³⁷AZM Anas, Defending the cause of urban poor, The Financial Express, 2016.

³⁸Muhammad Mahmood, Economic liberalization and rural poverty in Bangladesh, Financial Express, 2019.

³⁹Abdul Bayes, Women migration -- then and now, The Financial Express, 2016.

⁴⁰Abdul Bayes, Women migration -- then and now, The Financial Express, 2016.

⁴¹Nafisa Anjum, The Gender Wage Gap in the Public and Private Sector in Bangladesh, February 2016.

⁴²Tasneem Siddiqui, Situation Analysis of Migration Context and Policy Framework in Bangladesh, IOM, 2015.

International female migration trend (1960–2010)

Years	Per cent share of female migrants
1960	46.6
1970	47.2
1980	47.4
1990	47.9
2000	48.8
2010	49

Until the 1990s, women from low-earning rural families in Bangladesh started migrating independently to the Gulf and Southeast Asian countries to work as nurses, garments workers, manufacturing labourers, cleaners and housemaids. The late arrival of Bangladeshi women into the global labour market is primarily due to the restrictive policies of the state. While in the early 1970s, there were no clear-cut policies on female migration, over the 1980s and 1990s the state imposed a complete or partial ban on women's labour migration for unskilled, semiskilled and skilled jobs on the grounds of 'protecting the dignity of women'. The decision to restrict female migration of labour in all categories in 1997 was heavily opposed by the association of recruiting agencies (BAIRA), migrant associations and human rights organisations. Consequently, it was lifted in 2003, but new conditions were imposed that women undertake compulsory skill and orientation training for domestic work. The labour migration procedures for Bangladeshi women remain more complicated than those for men, who do not need to satisfy such requirements for migration.⁴³

A huge wage gap can be observed in remittance sending behaviour of external migrants. On average, a male migrant remits about Tk. 2,00,000 a year whereas female migrants remit Tk. 80,000 a year. Although female migrants earn less than male migrants, they (female) remit 90 per cent of their total income and male migrants remit 50 per cent of their income.⁴⁴ On average, a Bangladeshi migrant worker annually remits 115,178.42 Bangladeshi takas (BDT). Male migrant workers on average remit BDT 115,864.89 while migrant women workers on average remit only BDT 75,018.91. It has been estimated that from 1976 to 2012, a total of US\$107.76 billion was remitted by migrant workers to Bangladesh through official channels.⁴⁵ Research shows that although absorbed in low-paid unskilled

work, women are better remitters than men and send almost all their earnings back home for their family, while men save a portion for themselves. The onus on migrant women to remit money is no less than the men due to the high social cost attached to women's migration. Women are expected to send the whole earning in exchange for their long absence from the family. Crucially, the remittances sent by women are used to meet household expenditure, pay off loans, marriage and education of children and siblings.⁴⁶

6. Challenges of Migration

6.1. Internal Migration

Rapid urbanisation has caused heightened urban poverty with extremely poor living conditions for these rural migrants in urban setups.⁴⁷ This urbanisation has been spurred by the structural changes in the rural economy resulting from the increased commercialisation of the agriculture sector and widespread rural poverty. A major cause of urbanisation in Bangladesh is that the agriculture sector is no longer able to absorb the surplus labour force, which is encouraging people to seek employment outside agriculture and since most of the industrial establishments and businesses, as well as business services, are concentrated in the largest cities. The way migration is set in the capitalistic development discourse of Bangladesh denotes only one thing – the use and manage or control migration of labour both internally and externally to secure process of capitalist commodity production for market exchange in the furtherance of capitalist development.

The question of welfare for both in-country and out-country migrants are not in the development agenda. Emphasis on SDG that takes accounts on poverty and human dignity seems shallow. When assessing the success of the country's economic development, all capitalist institutions put an emphasis on economic growth which is measured in terms of increases in a country's national income. It is apparent in the trend of budgetary allocations of Bangladesh that priorities have been set to boost rapid industrialisation, enhance backward linkage and build infrastructure to lure Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Investment in agriculture, education, health and social protection have been put on the back burner. The capitalist migration theorists are also critical about the lack of initiatives by the GoB. They recommended that heavy investment is required to build a healthy, skilled workforce, who could be adequately utilised in productive employment,

⁴³<https://www.thedailystar.net/op-ed/remittances-come-price-103831>.

⁴⁴<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2017/12/28/mmru-remittance-migration-labour>.

⁴⁵Gender and migration from Bangladesh: Mainstreaming migration into the national development plans from a gender perspective International Labour Organization 2014.

⁴⁶<https://www.thedailystar.net/op-ed/remittances-come-price-103831>.

⁴⁷A.K.M. Helal uz Zaman, Khan Md. Tariqul Alam, Md. Jahirul Islam, Urbanization in Bangladesh: Present Status and Policy Implications, ASA University Review, 2010.

thereby raising overall economic growth and reduce inequality. They emphasised that greater focus should be given on policies to: (i) remove inequities in access to quality healthcare services, thereby ensuring healthy workforce; (ii) remove inequities in access to technical and tertiary education and bring about desired improvements in education, including its quality, thereby raising the skill level of the workforce; (iii) create an adequate number of full-time productive jobs to ensure decent jobs to the workforce; (iv) explore greater overseas employment opportunities, and provide training and skill development to migrant workers; and (v) strengthen micro and small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by making available easy credit facilities to them and by upgrading their skills.⁴⁸

6.2. External Migration

- Unscrupulous recruitment practices have led to high costs, fraudulent practices and pauperisation of a section of migrant workers. In destination countries, due to the arbitrariness of the employers and discriminatory policies of receiving states, many migrants face exploitation and loss of rights in the form of low and irregular wages, bad working conditions and restrictions on their movements. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) revealed that the cost of overseas migration is higher than the government-fixed rate which often benefits the brokers at both the origin and destination countries. During migration, the workers encounter troubles related to air travel and payment; face issues that violate their basic needs and rights; face gender-based violence; and so forth.
- Upon their arrival, the migrant workers' problems intensify, as they barely understand the language and are not accustomed to "different" food. The informal agreement of employment allows employers in the destination countries to harass them. Workers regularly complain about non-payment, underpayment and delayed payment, and lack substandard accommodation, provisions for food and other lower fringe benefits. In case of

an accident leading to the worker's death, it takes years to get compensation by the next of kin due to complex legal procedures of the host countries. Sometimes workers are repatriated after becoming handicapped temporarily or permanently due to accidents without getting proper treatment or compensation. Workers are also denied air tickets at the time of exit and often, their sponsors in the destination country do not adhere to the terms and conditions of employment.

- Less-skilled female workers from Bangladesh are at an increased risk of forced labour, exploitation, abuse and even human trafficking in their destination countries. Some find themselves in situations of forced labour or debt bondage where they face restrictions on their movements, non-payment of wages, threats and physical or sexual abuse.⁴⁹ Migrant domestic workers often find themselves in particularly unequal power relationships with their employers. They tend to face higher levels of isolation and discrimination because they are unable to associate with people outside their work environment. The situation is compounded if they do not speak the local language and are not aware of their rights. They may not have any local support networks and, not being part of any workers' unions, they are unfamiliar with the law and the local customs. They may be unable to access resources and assistance because they fear being deported or losing their employment.⁵⁰
- Currently, migrant workers including women are not covered in the social protection and safety net programmes. Bangladesh should incorporate migrant workers, as it is committed to by adopting international agreements including the Global Compact on Migration (Objective 21 (h)), the Commission on the Status of Women, Sixty-Third Session (CSW63) (Point u. P13–14) and SDG 8.8 (protection).⁵¹

⁴⁸Barkat-e-Khuda, Development in Bangladesh: How inclusive, The Financial Express, 2017.

⁴⁹<https://www.thedailystar.net/op-ed/remittances-come-price-103831>.

⁵⁰Gender and migration from Bangladesh: Mainstreaming migration into the national development plans from a gender perspective, International Labour Organization, 2014.

⁵¹Shakirul Islam, Social security for migrant workers: Some suggestions, The Daily Star, 2019.

1.3 Bhutan

Ethnic Dominance and Forced Migration in Bhutan

DNS Dhakal

1. Introduction

Bhutan's migration problem is unique. It has created forcible migration to exile, state-sponsored rural to rural migration and development triggered rural to urban migration. There is also international migration primarily among the young, educated Bhutanese inside the country and among the refugee communities under the third country resettlement programme. Today, about 20% of the country's population is in overseas countries primarily in the United States of America, if we include third country resettlement of some 113,000 Bhutanese refugees from Nepal. There is also a rapid trend of rural-urban migration at present, accounting nearly 21% of the total population in Bhutan.

2. Forcible Migration

Bhutan experienced unexpected protest movement in Southern Bhutan in 1990. The movement was triggered by a restrictive cultural policy of the Bhutan government and census re-enumeration exercise which placed its citizen into F1 to F7 categories. The seven categories were: F1: Bhutanese citizen; F2: a returned migrant; F3: an absentee during the census; F4: a non-national women married to Bhutanese men; F5: a non-national men married to Bhutanese women; F6: adopted children; and F7: non-national, primarily people from India. Reportedly, the citizenship status of some 18,000 Bhutanese was in question. The fear of disfranchising the citizenship rights of these people and for the protection of ethnic rights of Lhotshampa population compelled the Nepali ethnic population from six southern dzongkhags of the country to organise mass demonstrations in September of 1990. The royal government swiftly and brutally responded, expelling 84,000 of its citizen from southern Bhutan, primarily the people of Nepali ethnicity. By the end of the exodus, the proportion of Lhotshampas still in Bhutan had decreased from 40 per cent of the country's population to 26 per cent. The Sarbang population had decreased by 36 per cent, the Chirang population by 22 per cent, the Daga population by 18 per cent, the Samchi population by 14 per cent, the Samdrup

Jongkhar population by 10 per cent and the remaining dzongkhags by one per cent. The expelled population sought refuge in Nepal under the protection of UNHCR, which culminated into the mass resettlement of Bhutanese refugees to developed countries starting from 2008.

3. Rural to Rural Migration

Bhutan had organised rural to rural migration in the 1960s when it opened up its virgin area in southern foothills for agriculture farming primarily for landless people from Samchi, Dgapela and Chirang districts. In the aftermath of the 1990's protest movement, and with mass eviction of families who had participated in the peaceful activities, the royal government distributed the lands and properties of the evictees to the people from north or east Bhutan, including those Lhotshampas who had collaborated with Bhutan government for suppressing the protest movement. Some 30,000 people were moved to south Bhutan. They were permitted to occupy land and properties left behind by the fleeing Nepali Bhutanese. Southern Bhutan which was exclusively inhabited by ethnic Nepali Bhutanese has now mixed population, from north and east Bhutan, which comprise members of Ngalong and Sarchop communities. Despite the government propaganda of potential ethnic conflict, there are no reported clashes between the original inhabitants and recently migrated Ngalong and Sarchop under the state-sponsored resettlement programme.

4. Rural to Urban Migration

Initially, this was a post-1990's phenomenon. The rural population of south Bhutan moved to metro areas of western Bhutan to escape police and army atrocities. As the prominent villagers were compelled to leave the country in southern Bhutan, some Lhotshampas families decided to move to metro areas of Thimphu, Chimakoti and Phuntsholing to avoid harassment of the dissident activists and security forces. They soon began to build a life in non-agrarian economic activities, primarily picking up menial jobs in municipalities,

starting their own businesses and working as domestic helpers. This was followed by a construction boom of hydroelectric projects in Bhutan with investment from India. Such investment created low skilled jobs at project sites, which served as a pull factor to encourage rural to urban migration from other parts of Bhutan as well. As of today, some 21% of the rural population has moved to urban centres of western Bhutan where major urban centres are located. The sources of urban migration are Tashigang, Monger, Pemgatshel, Shemgang, Bumthang and Tongsa dzongkhags in east Bhutan and Dagana, Chirang, Samdrupzonkher and Samchi districts. Some of the villages in eastern and central Bhutan are getting emptied because of the surge of rural to urban migration. In the meantime, the infrastructure of western Bhutan is under stress due to steady growth in the migrant population. The population of Thimphu municipality has increased from 16,000 in 1986 to over 60,000 in 2017.

5. International Migration

Bhutan practically had no one migrating to overseas countries except for diplomatic posting or government-sponsored employment in international organisations. More recently, the UNHCR has facilitated third country resettlement of Bhutanese refugees to developed countries under the burden-sharing mechanism. Under this arrangement, more than 113,000 Bhutanese

refugees are resettled in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Netherland, Denmark and the United Kingdom. The USA alone has taken some 96,000 refugees.

Together with migration from inside the country, almost 20% of the country's population lives today in overseas countries. The contribution from the resettled Bhutanese community has been flowing into the country, accounting for 1.7% of GDP in the national economy. The government is planning to promote overseas employment to tackle the growing problem of unemployment in the country. To that end, it has taken steps to promote job-oriented education in partnership with friendly countries, notably Japan and South Korea.

6. Conclusion

Both rural to rural and international migration in Bhutan is due to deliberate policy choice of the royal government. Rural to urban migration is due to lopsided development policy which is exacerbating the flow of population from rural to urban areas. Almost one-fifth of the country's population today lives in urban areas although Bhutan is overwhelmingly an agrarian country. Unless Bhutan takes immediate steps to correct income generation opportunities in the rural areas, the trend of rural-urban migration of the population will be difficult to contain.

Migration in India: Seeking Connections to Poverty, Inequality and the Neoliberal State

Babu P Remesh and Tasha Agarwal⁵²

1. Introduction

Migration can be broadly divided into two categories. The first category is the 'migration of the better offs for betterment', where the people who are relatively resource-rich (and with better human resource profile – e.g. highly educated) move from their native places in search of better living standards and for earning higher incomes. The next category comprises migrants, who are (partially or fully) pushed out of their places of origin due to adverse circumstances – be it is unemployment, poverty, resource-crunch in rural areas, social exclusion/violence, environmental hazards and so on. While the first category of migration is voluntary, the second one is characterised by some degree of involuntariness and socio-economic coercions, as the migrants are forced to leave their homelands due to certain compelling reasons. Given the keen concern of SAAPE on issues of poor and underprivileged, the focus of the present report is on the second category of involuntary and forced-out migrants, who are mostly poor and often from socially and/or economically weaker sections. In the subsequent parts of this report, we will elaborate on the details of distresses, compulsions and dilemmas faced by these 'marginalised' segments of migrants.

Given the already stated bias of the report in favour of the migration of the poor, deprived and distressed, the following categories of migration are given prioritised attention:

- Internal and international migration of socio-economically weaker sections (including unskilled and semi-skilled workers), for employment and better livelihoods;
- Internally displaced persons – as victims of development activities or natural calamities or climate change;

- Women's migration – which covers various aspects of the connection between marriage migration and labour market (especially the eventual entry of married women from socio-economically weaker sections into the labour markets of their post-marital destinations), increasing feminisation of labour force in select sectors (e.g. readymade garments, domestic and care work) and many unique issues concerning women's work and migration;
- Refugees who are forced to move to other countries to escape adverse circumstances due to social/political/communal tensions.

The purpose of this report to give an overview of the migration scenario in India (with special focus on the migration of the poor, underprivileged and deprived) and to understand the decisive factors that shape migration behaviour in India.

2. Internal Migration in India

India is the second-largest country in the world in terms of population, with lopsided development. Whereas development takes place at a much faster rate in the urban centres, rural areas lag behind. Hence, every year lots of people move from one place to another in search of work, education or better standard of living etc. Most of these migrations take place from a relatively underdeveloped region to developed regions within the state or between the states.

The major source states include Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan while the major destination states are Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh etc. Most of these migrations are seasonal, where the migrants often work in the informal sector with poor working conditions.

The migration pattern of people belonging to SCs and STs have been predominantly seasonal where they move to work as construction labour, domestic help and other such informal sector workers. Here, migration

⁵²This is the summary of the SAAPE Migration Report – INDIA, 2019 titled, "Migration in India: Seeking Connections to Poverty, Inequality and the Neoliberal State", prepared by the first author with research assistance from the second author.

is predominantly within a state or outside a state (within Indian geographical boundary). Apart from economic reasons, migration of underprivileged communities often takes place to escape caste hierarchy and social exclusions/discriminations existing in their native places. However, the social baggage of caste remains with them, and in many cases, they face caste-based exploitation at the destinations, too.

3. International Migration from India

3.1. Indian Immigrants

India assumes a significant place in the international migration map, as a prominent country of origin, transit and destination in South Asia. It is the largest migrant-sending country in South Asia (Rajan, 2017). As per estimates, in 2015, one out of twenty migrants in the world is born in India and 15.6 million Indians are in the other countries (Connor, 2017).

Table 1: Major Destination Countries of Indians Immigrants (2017)

Countries	Number of Persons
UAE	3,310,419
United States	2,307,909
Saudi Arabia	2,266,216
Pakistan	1,873,650
Oman	1,201,995
Kuwait	1,157,072
United Kingdom	836,524
Qatar	658,488
Canada	602,146
Nepal	440,198

Source: UNDESA (2017).

3.2. Refugees and Asylum Seekers

India is home to the largest number of refugees in South Asia. There is a large number of refugees from neighbouring countries, including Tibet, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

Table 2: Stock of International Emigrants and Immigrants

	In-Migration to India (In thousands)	Out-Migration from India (In thousands)
Refugees	197.1	7.9
Asylum Seekers	10.5	NA
IDPs	806	NA
Migrants	5188.6	16587.7

Source: European Union (2019).

Major source countries for immigration of migrants in India are Bangladesh (3,139,000), Pakistan (1,095,000), Nepal (537,517), Sri Lanka (153,643) and Myanmar (50,081). Major source countries for refugees in India are China (108,008), Sri Lanka (61,842), Myanmar (18,089) and Somalia (664).

3.3 Remittance

India is the largest receiver of overseas remittance. The current remittance-GDP ratio stands at 2.8%. Some states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh have a higher remittance-GDP ratio.

4. Determinants and Issues of Migration

4.1. Drivers and Determinants of Migration

Poverty and inequality remain the prime concerns for the Indian economy. Most of the determining factors for migration are exacerbated by the dual issues of poverty and inequality. The major determinants of migration are:

- Urbanisation and regional disparities**

A crucial aspect of rural-urban migration is the existence of wider regional disparities. Normally, the opportunities and facilities in the destination regions (urban) will be better or very attractive compared to the rural source-regions.

- Rural distress**

The growing rate of landlessness, depletion of natural resources, a decline in common property resources, conversion of lands, non-viability of agriculture, escalating cost of cultivation, price crash etc. have led to the migration of people looking for an alternative source of employment.

- Climate-induced displacement**

The geographical location of Indian territory has rendered several states vulnerable and prone to natural disasters. The frequency of such natural disaster has also increased in recent years owing to environmental imbalances created due to global warming and unplanned developments. Several studies have pointed towards the rampant displacement of people due to environmental factors such as earthquake, drought, flood and cyclone.

- Development-induced displacement**

India also is home to populations which are displaced by development projects in neighbouring countries. With the expansion of metro cities,

undertaking of development projects such as dams, irrigation projects, roads, highways, canals, mines, power plants and industrial development activities, many of the erstwhile marginal and small farmers and agricultural labour get eventually pushed out of their villages, and they join the pool of 'transit labour' and 'footloose labour', who increasingly constitute major segments of migrant-labour in urban spaces.

- **Demographic factors**

India is currently in a phase characterised by a 'demographic dividend', where a larger share of the population falls in the working-age group, the effect of which is seen both in internal as well as international migration. Countries like Australia, USA and Germany etc. are ageing, while India, China etc. are considered to be young countries. Similarly, within India, southern states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are ageing while the northern states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha are mostly young. Hence, lies the potential for migration.

- **Socio-political conflicts**

Tensions based on identity, religion, ethnicity/ social group, language etc. serve as major reasons for migration for certain groups of the population. Socio-political tensions also lead to reverse migration in certain cases. For example, return migration of North-eastern migrants after rumour-mongering.

- **Improved connectivity and availability of communication channels**

Improved physical connectivity through transport facilities, roads, infrastructure, expressways, connecting trains and virtual connectivity through the internet, social media, telephone networks and so on, have played a crucial role in migration. Not only have these channels helped in facilitating migration but also connecting the migrants and their families, staying in far-off places.

5. Issues and Challenges of Migration

Three major phases concerning issues related to migration are:

- **Pre-migration issues**

These include inefficient functioning of government provisions, absence of right information about the destination regions, employment availability in destinations, absence of reliable institutional mechanisms, institutional credit facilities, malicious practices of recruitment agents and middlemen, trafficking etc.

- **Post-migration issues**

These include poor living and working conditions at destination such as irregular payment of wages, withholding of wages, paying wages that are less than what is promised, salary deductions, denial of medical insurance and long working hours. Most of them stay in slums and temporary settlements with deplorable living conditions. These include inadequate access to water, electricity and other basic facilities. There is an absence of basic rights such as obtaining voter ids, bank accounts, passports, ration cards etc. Hence, they face different layers of economic, social and political exclusion.

- **Issues of return-migrants**

Financial help during the time of return, provision of institutional credit, assurance of basic social security benefits and/or availability of some basic employment back home are the major issues that the return-migrants often look for. Integration of return-migrants back into their native economies is also a major challenge, as the labour absorption capacities of local economies are strikingly low.

6. Women and Migration

6.1. Women and Internal Migration

Table 3: Gender-Wise Composition of Internal Migrants

Category	Female (%)	Male (%)
Rural to Urban	89.4	10.6
Urban to Rural	73.1	26.9
Rural to Rural	55.4	44.6
Urban to Urban	59.1	40.1

Source: Census 2011.

Women form a major percentage of internal migration, where marriage has been cited as one of the major reasons for their migration. Women also migrate for employment and as a family member, reverting the conventional model of 'women as follower migrants'. Beyond livelihood, women are also seen to migrate to escape the problems at home and to move away from the clutches of parental and familial control and to explore the opportunities at a new place. They also move to earn dowries or to save enough money for having a settled family life. A striking example in this regard is the Sumangali system of Tamil Nadu.

In the case of women migration, sometimes there is a dilution of the boundary between marriage, labour

migration and trafficking. There is 'hidden labour migration' behind the stream of marriage migration; for example, the case of bought wives in Haryana.

6.2 Women's International Migration

The gendered nature of immigration policies restricts the immigration of women which is presented as a supposed safety and welfare mechanism for women. However, such licensing leads to an increase in the cost of migration, exploration of unauthorised and undocumented means to emigrate, complete reliance of migrants on the sponsor which further perpetuates violence on these women. Horrendous cases such as trafficking, sex trade and organ trade have always been a matter of concern.

Women are also expected to consider care-giving as their primary duty; hence, when they move to another

country leaving back their family and children, they are sometimes looked down, tortured and harassed by their family members as well as the society.

7. Conclusion

India has been an active participant in the process of migration, both internal as well as international. Different factors determine the reason as to why people migrate. However, in the core of all such determinants, poverty and inequality remain as the two major factors which guide the rationale for migration. It is the poor who are more vulnerable to changing circumstances. Hence, they seek migration as a possible solution to their problems. However, migration in itself holds further nuances for an individual right from the time when a person feels the need to migrate, to the time when she or he plans to return home.

1.5 Maldives

Immigration and Climate Induced Migration: The Case of Maldives

Azim Zahir

1. Introduction

The Maldives is mainly a migration destination country. This summary report, therefore, focuses on international migration into the country and, to some extent, internal migration within the country. Specifically, it provides an overview of the main patterns, key drivers of migration and the main issues surrounding migration.

Over the past 30 years, there has been a huge influx of migrant workers into the Maldives and major internal migration from atolls to mainly the capital, Male. Liberalising economic policies and the growth and demand of the tourism, construction and business sectors have been the driving forces behind the migration into the country over this period. Similarly, in the context of the growing disparity between the capital, Male, and the rest of the country, the search for jobs, better healthcare and education, explain internal migration to the capital.

Migration in the country is characterised by major socio-economic, urban and environmental issues. Discrimination, exploitation and trafficking of migrant workers have become a major issue. Internal migration has its organic problems, and it has created problems at destination places, too. Increase in inequality, living costs, unemployment especially among the youth, housing crisis, pollution and the transformation of the capital Male as one of the most densely populated cities in the world, are some of the key problems related to internal migration.

2. Context

Approximately 1,190 islands of the Maldives make up a total landmass 297.8 sq km. A population of 338,434 people are dispersed across about 200 of these islands. Over a third of the population live in the capital Male and the rest in 187 administrative islands and about 7% in resort islands and non-administrative islands.

This population distribution took place largely since the 1970s, which heralded a crucial modernising juncture. Introduction and rapid expansion of the tourism

sector, along with fishery has propelled economic growth since then. The consequent expansion in the construction, business and finance and social and community services sectors, created the driving forces behind migration into the country as well as significant internal migration.

3. Internal Migration: Trajectory, Drivers and Issues

Internal migration to the capital Male has become a significant phenomenon from the 1980s. In 1921, the Male population was 6,127. According to the 2014 census data, approximately 38 per cent (about 150,000) of the Maldivian population lived in Male. The migrant population from other islands account for 56% of the Male population. The population growth between Male and the atolls is also stark. By 2006, the population growth rate of Male had reached 5.59 per cent, while the figure for overall annual national population growth was only 1.69 per cent.

The key driver behind the internal migration to Male from atoll has been the growing economic disparity between Male and the atolls. For example, according to a 2016 survey by the government, households in Male earned about \$2,400 a month, while the average for households in the atolls is \$1,190. Similarly, per capita income in Male is double that of the islands. The development of tourism is focused around Male; the expansion of the public and private sector and better health and educational facilities in the capital contributed to the rising disparity. People from other rural islands, therefore, migrate in search of jobs and basic needs such as employment opportunities, better education and healthcare available in the capital.

Internal migration has also taken place and is likely to take place due to climate and natural disaster-induced displacement. As the islands are very low-lying—the highest point being 2.4 metres above the sea-level—the Maldives is particularly vulnerable to sea-level rises. The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, for example, showed the extreme vulnerability of the Maldives.

International migration is accompanied by significant socio-economic, urban and environmental problems. While the disparity between the capital and other islands has been the driving force of migration, migration itself has been characterised by socio-economic inequality. At a national level, some 12,000 families do not have adequate housing. The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives' report on housing in 2008 concluded that about 68% of the households in Male could be considered overcrowded. While the average household size for Male stood at 7.4, according to the 2006 Population and Housing Census, for example, 23% of Male households live in one room, 54% live in two rooms and 77% live in three rooms. Male is therefore likely to be the city with the highest number of slums in a capital city of any Middle-Income Countries.

The housing situation in Male indicates the economic burdens, particularly on the migrant population. About 63% of the households in Male live in rented housing and 23% of the expenditure by households is on rent. The high demand for rental housing has led to exorbitant rents compared to average income. In 2016, the average rent for Male stood at \$830, while the average household income was about \$2,400.

Migration to Male has also resulted in overpopulation. The total land area of the capital city is about 1.98 square kilometres, and about 66,000 people live per square kilometre, making the Maldivian capital one of the most densely populated areas in the world. The overpopulation in the capital has put enormous pressure on water and sanitation as well as causes a seemingly insurmountable crisis of traffic congestion in the capital.

4. Immigration: Trajectory, Drivers and Issues

There were a few expatriate workers before the 1970s. The number started to increase since the 1970s and substantially increased from the 1990s. In 1990, there were an estimated 8,689 migrant workers, but by January 2019, there were 144,607 migrant workers – a 17-fold increase within under 30 years. Out of the 144,607 migrant workers, the government claims there were an estimated 63,000 'illegal' migrant workers. The high figure of undocumented migrant workers suggests the actual number of foreign migrant workers in the country may be underestimated.

In 2011, Bangladeshi nationals made up 57% of the regular foreign migrant worker population, followed by Indians (23%), Sri Lankans (10%) and Filipinos (1.5%). Regular foreign migrant workers make up the majority of four sectors: construction (88%), community and social services (78%), tourism (72%) and financial and business services sector (72%). A Field Survey Report published by the International Organisation

for Migration in 2014 reports that the majority of male migrants work in the construction and service sectors, while female migrants are mainly employed as domestic workers.

The increase in migrant workers is largely an imperative of economic liberalisation and privatisation since the 1970s and especially the 1980s. The expansion in the tourism and construction sectors, both largely privately-owned, in particular, created the demands for foreign labour. Other factors included the infrastructure shortcomings, weak higher education sector and a lack of local skills. The growing income inequality within the South Asian region is also suggested to be a reason for the increase, as migrant workers seek opportunities in other countries. An IOM Field Survey in 2014 also suggests that the majority of respondents from migrant workers interviewed mentioned 'better salary' or 'better job opportunities' as reasons for coming to the Maldives.

Migrant workers are possibly the most vulnerable and marginalised group of people in the Maldives. A US Department of State report in 2019 stated that migrant workers are subjected to practices indicative of human trafficking and forced labour. Some are also subjected to sex trafficking and others faced debt bondage inside the country. Three Bangladeshi men were sentenced to 10 years in jail for sex trafficking in November 2016. However, there have been no convictions since. Trials have been stalled in four different trafficking cases against five Maldivian and seven Bangladeshi defendants and the Prosecutor General's office pressed sex trafficking charges against one Maldivian defendant. In October 2017, three prosecution witnesses testified in favour of the first Maldivians charged with human trafficking. Given the situation, the Maldives is placed under Tier 2 Watch List of human trafficking by the United States, showing that the Maldives does not comply with its Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000.

Migrant workers also face a dire housing situation, with no adequate housing for many. Many are forced to share small spaces with many others without adequate ventilation and basic facilities such as a kitchen. Often, they are forced to live in the places they work, including construction sites. In the capital, for example, as many as 30 men may be sharing 9 square-metre flats without running water and sanitation facilities. Many are forced to sleeping in shifts as not all of them fit into the space they occupy.

Similarly, migrant workers have no adequate access to healthcare. Most migrant workers have no medical insurance, and the public healthcare insurance system of Aasandha does not cover them. Undocumented migrant workers, lacking passports (because they have been confiscated) or work permits may also be

denied medical care. A Bangladeshi migrant worker who worked as a cashier at a shop in the capital, for example, reportedly died in 2019 after he was unable to seek treatment as hospitals refused to serve expatriates without passports or work permits.

A video and photographs showing 200 migrant workers packed into a small ferry, which became viral on social media in 2018, highlighted the dire working conditions that migrant workers face in the Maldives. Migrant workers encounter grave occupational safety and health issues, especially in the construction industry. There have also been reports of death from falling because of inadequate safety measures. In August 2018, for example, a Bangladeshi migrant worker died after falling into a brick-laying machine in Fares Island, where a resort was being developed. Migrant workers also face a range of other issues. Non-payment of

wages is a key issue. There have also been several cases of violence and xenophobic attacks against migrant workers.

5. Conclusion

Socio-economic changes associated with neoliberal policies have been the key determinants of migration. In the Maldives, internal migration to the capital is driven by the growing disparity between the capital and the islands, which in turn is due to economic activities focused on the centre. Migration into the country from neighbouring countries is similarly driven by the search for better income and jobs. However, migration has been accompanied by major socio-economic issues (including growing inequality), human trafficking, housing crises and urban and environmental issues.

1.6 Nepal

Dynamics of Nepali Labour Migration: Compulsion vs Aspiration

Keshav Bashyal

Currently, Nepal is one of the major migrant-origin countries to the Gulf States and Malaysia. Nepal is both origin and destination country for India. In Nepal, migration is largely a male-dominated phenomenon, which is similar to other South Asian countries. One of the reasons largely attributed to male migration is the traditional belief that male is a breadwinner and female a homemaker and cultural restrictions on women's mobility in public spaces. Since 1985, the Government of Nepal has been highly dependent on private recruitment agencies to send Nepali workers abroad. The recruitment process has never done justice to migrant, and they charge more money to migrant workers.

1. Nepali State and the Colonial Influence on the Early Migration

During the First World War, the British wanted to enrol lots of youths in their army to fight against their enemy or to capture more land and resources. During the time of British colonial rule in India, Shaha kings and Ranas rulers were in power in Nepal. Rana rulers had established close ties with the British colonial regime, who continuously influenced the Ranas in their favour. They used Nepali youths to fight a few decisive battles to suppress the Indian uprising. The Gurkha Brigade was developed as an institution for trading the Nepalese hill-youths. The exact numbers of Gorkha soldiers who died in the wars are still not known. Neither the Government of Nepal nor the British government made attempts to ascertain the exact figures of war casualties. It is still a mystery.

2. Internal Migration

Over the last four decades until the 1990s, of the total internal migration in Nepal, the volumes of lifetime migrants had been continuously increasing. The migration increased more rapidly after the eradication of malaria and an overall improvement in road connectivity in the Tarai districts. The malaria eradication programme, started in the 1950s during the time of King Mahendra, was largely a state-led initiative to make the region more hospitable to a

human population to increase agriculture land to boost economic output. Following this, the construction of the East-West Highway along the southern foot of the hills and state-led land reform and resettlement programmes contributed to a massive movement of population from the hills into the Tarai, increasing the area for agriculture.

In the migration process, the Tarai region and some of the urban centres in the hills received a greater volume of migrants while most of the hill districts experienced net population loss. In the last two to three decades, after the restoration of democracy in 1990, the expansion of employment opportunities in the informal sector is largely associated with a massive level of internal migration. According to the 2011 census, most migrants in Nepal originated from the hills (63%) and they moved to the Tarai (70%). The Tarai region received the largest volume of the population through the migration process. A general pattern of the hill to Tarai migration is largely a north-south phenomenon where the movement has been largely concentrated to the destinations adjacent to Tarai areas in the south.

3. Nepali Migration to India

Contemporary migration between Nepal and India has been a result of various formal and informal ties based on the historical, cultural, social legacy between the two countries. These historical legacies facilitated the unrestricted movement of people across the border, except in some conflict-ridden areas. Keeping the border open between Nepal and India is the product of the shared culture of the colonial past (Bashyal, 2014). The continuation of the open border between Nepal and India till date has been attributed to the security needs and political and historical reasons. Considering the geographic situation of Nepal and India, an open border that facilitates the movement of people from one country to another also support their economic and religious needs on both sides (Rajabachak, 1992). Formally, the 1950 Nepal-India Treaty has facilitated the relationship between the two countries. Many opinions have been diversely voiced regarding this treaty, especially by Nepalese academics, political

parties and social activists. Some of them have opined that it 'should be revised in order to put the relationship between the two countries on a more realistic footing'.

Along with the provision of reciprocal treatment, long historical continuities, geographical proximity and socio-cultural affinities, the open border between the two countries, India has been a major destination for migrants from Nepal. The exact number of Nepali migrants in India is still contested. Each source has a different idea and numbers. Census of Nepal (CBS) counts Nepali migrants in India based on absentee population in the households.

While some migrant Nepalis work in government offices, police or army, most young migrant work in menial and low paid jobs in the informal services sector, including security, construction, manufacturing and agricultural. The demand for Nepalis working as chowkidars in factories is declining, although there is an increasing demand for Nepali workers in hotel/restaurants. As domestic workers and caregivers for the elderly in middle-class households in metro cities and increasingly in smaller towns and cities in India, Nepalis are in demand (Bashyal, 2014). The most common destinations in India for Nepalis are Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune, Ludhiana, Amritsar and Almora, Nainital, Shimla and Pithauragadh. Social networks and inheritance have played a crucial role in sustaining the migration circle between the original villages in western hills and specific destinations in India (Thieme, 2006).

4. International Migration (Other Than India)

Over the past 60 years, the number of Nepali migrants to international destinations beyond India has increased significantly from about 200,000 in the 1950s to approximately two million by 2011. The most visible change occurred between 2001 and 2011 when the number of Nepalis migrants during the period increased twofold.

Table 1: Population Absent From Households Abroad by Sex, Nepal, 1981–2011

Census	Absentee Population	Migration to Abroad (Except India)	Male	Female
1981	402,977	27,781	20,277	-
1991	658,290	40,481	32,477	7,120
2001	762,181	173,131	158,989	-
2011	1,921,494	1,178,926	1,062,755	4,865

In terms of the proportion of the migrants, the ratio of females going to the West (USA, Canada and the European Union) is higher than those going anywhere else. Of the total migrants in the 'USA and Canada', and

'European Union countries', about 33 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively, were females, with those going to 'Other Asian' countries (at 21.9 per cent) a distant third (see Table 3) (CBS, 2011). After the enactment of the Foreign Employment Act (FEA), 2007, the trend of labour migration from Nepal concentrated in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Malaysia. There is a greater demand for migrants in GCC countries. From 2008/09 to 2014/15, labour migration to these countries accounted for 85 per cent of all migration activities. Similarly, among them, labour migration is highly male-centric, and it is more than 95 per cent of all those obtained labour permits. The database from the Department of Foreign Department shows that over 3.5 million labour permits had been issued in nine years till 2016/17 since the enactment of the FEA Act in 2007.

The number of Nepali migrants abroad is estimated to be bigger than government records. This has been attributed to the lack of an effective monitoring system and controlled permit mechanism of the Nepal government. Agents very often mislead Nepali youths to go abroad through illegal channels. In this process, agents do not provide any agreements and contracts to the migrant workers and they send them through unrecorded routes. In this process, even if migrants successfully land to the destination countries, they remain undocumented. In such cases, they will experience difficulties in receiving legal and institutional support from the government agencies of Nepal.

Similarly, migrants undergo several bad experiences during the migration process, which puts their physical, mental and social well-being at risk. Upon reaching the destination too, migrants often face various forms of exploitation, a low level of income and social exclusion, which negatively impacts the family and their health, especially in countries of destination, and at home.

Table 2: Top Destination Countries for Foreign Employment, 2008/09–2016

Destination Countries	Numbers (%)
Malaysia	29.88
Qatar	21.57
Saudi Arabia	20.37
UAE	10.62
Kuwait	2.54
Republic of Korea	1.32
Bahrain	0.86
Oman	0.63
Japan	0.35
Lebanon	0.21
Other countries	11.65

The labour permits are acquired either through recruitment agencies or personal initiatives. There is a variation in the proportion of labour permits issued. More than two-third of labour migrants sought permits via recruitment agencies and there is a corresponding decline in the labour permits issued at the individual level, which stood about 25% in the year 2008–2009 and declined to almost 8% in 2016–2017.

5. Women Migration

Due to lack of livelihood options to sustain their family, women are also forced to migrate. Among women, there is a very low level of awareness of legal provisions and necessary documentation for foreign employment (Pourakhi, 2017). Women constitute a significantly lower percentage of international migrants, a ratio that has remained almost the same even in the inter-census decade between 2001 and 2011 that shows a small increase in international migration, registering only 12 females for every 100 males abroad in the 2011 census, a marginal increase compared to 11:100 in 2001. Eighty-six per cent of women who migrated from their original places moved within Nepal. Eight per cent migrated to India and very few to other countries. About one-third of women who migrated for work moved to countries other than India. Women were less likely to migrate to other countries for non-work related reasons. Region-wise, women from the far-western Tarai were more likely to migrate to India, primarily due to cross-border marriage practices. India was the second common destination for women migrants from the lowest wealth quintile, while those in the highest wealth quintile were more likely to migrate to other countries (NDHS, 2016). Despite restrictions, a small number of women have been going abroad but the destinations are not similar to men.

Lebanon was a major destination for women migrants until 2009, the year when the Nepal government banned women from working as domestic workers. The ban brought a drastic decrease in the number of labour permits issued to Nepali women going to Lebanon. In the fiscal year 2007/08, 2,490 women were issued permits to work in Lebanon; this number reached 3,696 in the year 2009/10, but in the year 2010/11, it decreased to 84, with a marginal increase to 369 in 2012/13. Later, the UAE became the prime designation for Nepali women migrants followed by Malaysia, Kuwait and Qatar. As stated earlier, the ratio of permits issued to male and female by the government indicates a huge difference in the labour migration from Nepal. Women are assumed to be more vulnerable in terms of the risk of sexual assault in a foreign land (Oishi, 2005; Piper, 2009). In 2012, a temporary ban on migration to the Gulf region was placed for women younger than 30 years of age, and this ban was extended to the

women of all ages in 2014. Though this restriction was partially relaxed in 2015 by reducing the minimum age for migration to 24, women's migration to most destinations still requires strict oversight (ILO, 2015). Such regulations are influenced by the patriarchal ideology that seeks to 'protect' women by restricting their physical mobility (Bhadra, 2007). Despite such restrictions, the number of women migrating for work has risen over time, and the ban and restrictions have also facilitated migration through irregular channels (Clewett, 2015).

6. Migration Transit through India

Labour migrants are required to comply with the norms and procedures prescribed by the Foreign Employment Act, 2007 and Foreign Employment Rules, 2008 in Nepal as specified for foreign labour migration. Those who do not complete all the documents and travel abroad for jobs without prior permission from the government qualify as undocumented migrant workers. Major Indian cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai, as well as Dhaka in Bangladesh, were identified as unofficial routes for sending Nepali labour migrants to destination countries. In 2010, the government revoked the ban and data shows that the number of female migrants workers in the GCC countries soared thereafter. According to the records maintained by the Department of Foreign Employment, there is a threefold increase in Nepali women migrants employed in the GCC countries between FY 2008–2009 and FY 2011–2012. The numbers of women migrants in two primary destinations stood Kuwait (12,495) and the UAE (4,523) in FY 2011–2012, absorbing nearly 90 per cent of all registered female labour migrants in the GCC. The number indicates that there is a demand for women migrants in the domestic work sector in Gulf countries. Women seek these avenues as a way of improving their livelihood options. The government instituted the age restrictive ban for women in the domestic work sector in 2012. The government policy of putting restrictions on women seeking to work abroad contributed to the increased irregular migration. A research conducted by Paurakhi says that out of 15 women returnee migrants, seven of them used India as a transit because of restrictions on migration from Nepal. Few of them reported the Indian route was quick, easy and economical. Recruitment agents often take advantage of ignorant and powerless migrants.

7. Neoliberal Agenda and Migration

The structural adjustment program (SAP) of the IMF and World Bank was implemented in Nepal in the mid-1980s hoping to accelerate economic development and growth after facing a deficit in the balance of payments (BoP) in the first half of the 1980s. The

World Bank and the IMF, unlike in the past, have given priority on the internalisation of ownership of policies and programmes in the developing countries (Khanal, 2015). Despite the implementation of SAP and neoliberal policies for more than two decades, Nepal is still experiencing a low level of human development ranking (Shrestha & Prakash, 2010). Nepal has liberalised external accounts, financial sector and privatised some public enterprises, dismantled industrial policy intervention and allowed a greater private sector role in economic activities by downsizing the role of the government. However, all of these IMF supported structural adjustment programmes failed to focus on generating employment to reduce the unemployment problem of Nepal (ibid). Due to financial deregulation, the number of banks and financial institutions (BFI's) exploded between 1992 and 2011 – from 8 to 31 commercial banks (often joint efforts with foreign investors), from 4 to 87 development banks and from zero to 80 finance firms (Sapkota, 2011). While Nepal's massive remittance economy ensures that deposits in the capital's private banks continue to grow due to the flow of remittances, those financial institutions have emerged in large numbers, and it benefited to very few persons involved in these financial activities (ibid).

8. Remittances in Nepal – An Example of Increasing Influence of Neoliberal Economy and Rising Vulnerability of Migrant Workers

Remittances such as play a crucial role in the national economy and it has transformed it from agriculture to remittance economy. As discussed in the section above at length, remittance inflow to Nepal has a long history, and it began with the entry of Nepalese youths in the British Indian Army in the nineteenth century and has been continuing till date. Likewise, the increased number of Nepalese migrant workers in India also contributed to bringing substantial remittances from India. This initial phase of foreign employment came to a change in the second stage in the 1990s when a large number of Nepalese opted for jobs in Malaysia and Gulf countries. Foreign employment of Nepali youths is still concentrated in India, Malaysia, Gulf nations and South Korea. USA and Australia are an attraction for thousands of Nepali students each year.

According to the World Bank reports (2017), recruitment and transactions costs are the major bottlenecks of remittance regime. The report concludes that recruitment costs paid by low-skilled workers are often more than a year's worth of income. This happens to be true in Nepal's case too in major remittance corridors. Despite the "free-visa-and-free-ticket" provision of the Government of Nepal, the deceitful manpower agencies in Nepal are charging huge fees to the poor migrant workers, mostly from rural communities.

Migrant labourers are generally compelled to pay such high amount of money to the manpower agents.

9. State Response to Migration (Policies and Institution)

While the growing number of Nepali migrants have contributed substantially to the National economy through remittances, it has also created various issues in Nepal as well as in the destination countries. As reported earlier, the issues of vulnerability and lack of safety and security systems, frequent incidents of injuries and deaths are common. At the same time, the restrictions and conditional restrictions placed women migrants, limited options to migrate through official channels have compelled women to take unofficial routes to migrate. To tackle these issues, the government of Nepal has enacted laws, policies, rules and regulations to guide migration thereby influencing the pattern and flow of Nepali migrants.

One of the early legislation enacted by the Nepal government was the Foreign Employment Act of 1985. The Act aimed to regulate the migrant workers leaving for foreign employment abroad other than India. During the time until the 1990s, the volume of migrants was relatively low. However, after the restoration of democracy in 1990, the government adopted a liberal approach to address the labour migration issue. It opened the doors to private sectors to engage intensively in the migration process. Since then, out-migration flow has been steadily increasing.

Under Article 51 (i) (5) of the Constitution of Nepal 2015, "Policies relating to labour and employment", it is recognised that the government would work "to regulate and manage the sector in order to make foreign employment free from exploitation, safe and systematic and to guarantee employment and rights of the labourers."

Timeline of Key Events in Foreign Employment Governance in Nepal	
Year	Description
1985	Enactment of the first law on foreign employment: Foreign Employment Act
1992	Final amendment of the Foreign Employment Act
1998	Second amendment of the Foreign Employment Act
1999	Enactment of Foreign Employment Rules, 1999
2003	The Nepal government becomes a member of the Colombo Process – a regional consultation forum on the management of foreign employment and contractual labour

2007	Enactment of the new law: Foreign Employment Act, 2007
2008	Establishment of Foreign Employment Board
	Establishment of the Department of Foreign Employment
	Enactment of Foreign Employment Rules, 2008
2010	Establishment of Foreign Employment Tribunal
2011	First amendment of Foreign Employment Rules, 2011
2012	First Foreign Employment Policy, 2012
2015	Development of the five-year National Strategic Action Plan on Foreign Employment Act, 2007
2016	First SAARC level regional consultation on labour migration held by Government of Nepal together with SAARC secretariat
2017	Nepal becomes the Chair of the Colombo Process

Almost two decades after the adoption of first FEA, the government inclined to govern the issues of migrant workers and shifted most of the responsibility to private sectors and individuals providing services for foreign employment.

10. Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal

It became history for many about the Bhutanese refugee problems and how they came from their own country through India. Most of them resettled in the third country. In the early 1990s, the Druk regime of Bhutan forced out about 100,000 Nepali-speaking people. There are still about 7,000 in two camps in Nepal.

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) has already warned to shutting down two remaining camps and that led to crisis to rest of refugees. The Government of Nepal also does not have any concrete plan about the long-pending repatriation of the refugees. If nothing changes, those refugees will stay in the camps. There is a chance of humanitarian crisis to the lives of hundreds of children and elderly people if UNHCR pulls out humanitarian support. There were 16 rounds of bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan, but Thimphu always refused to take back any of the 100,000 ethnic Nepalis. Their strategy is to convince Kathmandu to absorb the remaining refugees permanently. If not settled down properly, that would be a blunder because there are still about 100,000 ethnic Nepalis are living in Bhutan, and denying them citizenship might lead to a second forced exodus. While the remaining refugees in eastern Nepal waiting to go to their home country,

all the stakeholders need to increase pressure on the Bhutanese government for the dignified return of the Bhutanese nationals⁵³.

11. Discussions and Conclusion

Nepal's out-migration has a long history, and it dates back to the establishment of the modern state. For a long time, India remained the primary destination, which is unregulated and lacks official documentation. Migration from Nepal to Gulf countries is comparatively a recent development. Nepal is becoming an important source of low-skilled workers to GCC countries. In the last two decades, migration of female workers to the region has increased considerably, especially to service-related sectors like domestic work and health care fields. Due to the conditional restrictions for women migrants, there is a greater chance that women might choose illegal channels of migration, becoming more vulnerable.

With the steady growth of migrants in recent years, Nepal has undertaken several policy measures to deal with international migration. Broadly these include steps to reform the regulatory and institutional framework; to tackle the recruitment process and the cost of international migration; to protect the conditions of work and the rights of migrant workers abroad, including bilateral agreements with destination countries; to ensure safe migration of women workers; the promotion of awareness to aspirant migrants; labour market information systems, pre-departure training and skills promotion; promotion of formal financial intermediation; and to provide social security to migrant workers, their families and returnees. The actual implementation of most of these laws and policies appear to be largely ineffective. There is a gap in the policy and implementation of complaint mechanisms, which currently leaves migrant workers without adequate means to seek legal support and redress their grievances. Lack of standard operating procedures, inadequate awareness activities and ineffective services are considerable barriers. Generally, effective mechanisms do not exist for resolving cross-border labour-related disputes, such as contract substitution, delay in payment and compensation and redressal of grievances of migrants, and taking action against abuses by the recruiting agencies and employers in the destination countries.

12. Way Forward

National policies on labour migration need to be seen in the context of the goals of development and from the perspectives of migrants. From the standpoint of migrants, development must also be able to fine-tune with the basic rights of migrant workers and their

⁵³<https://www.nepalitimes.com/opinion/who-stands-with-bhutanese-refugees-in-nepal/>.

families. Both internal and international migrations lead to broadly similar consequences. For the internal as well as international migrant workers, who are at the lower end of the labour market, the lack of social security at the place of destination is an important question. They suffer from a range of vulnerabilities and deprivations. Given the common causes and consequences of Nepali migration to abroad and its link with national development, there is a need to respect human rights of migrants, which are essential to an integrated rights-based approach towards the different types of migration. Further, Nepal is required

to formulate an integrated, active labour-market policy, focusing on education, skills development, labour-market information systems and other appropriate labour-market interventions, which only can prepare the young labour force to participate productively in the national and global labour markets. Such a policy must also specifically address rampant gender and social discrimination in the migration process and in the workplace. Furthermore, policies should improve formal financial intermediation to lower the cost of migration and facilitate the transfer of remittances through formal channels.

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1.7 Pakistan

Navigating Precarity: A Report on Poverty, Migration and Inequality in Pakistan

Ammar Ali Jan

1. Introduction

Much like the rest of South Asia, Pakistan has witnessed rapid urbanisation over the past few decades. An estimated 37 to 39 per cent of the population is categorised as urban, but it is widely predicted that the country's urban population will reach 50 per cent of the total population by 2030⁵⁴. While the rural to urban migration has opened up economic opportunities for industries in the cities, it has also exposed the dangerous fault lines in the country's growth model, with the working poor, in particular, bearing the costs of a flawed economic model.

The story of Pakistan is similar to those of other countries in the region that have undergone the IMF dictated 'Structural Adjustment Programs' to facilitate a neoliberal paradigm in the country's economy. The ostensible aim of this policy has been to promote free-market in the production and exchange of goods and to develop the economy through an export-led strategy. This has led to a bias in favour of large industries and foreign investments that are centred in the cities, while there has been a remarkable reduction in subsidies for the agriculture sector, as well to the social sector, including health and education.

This report is intended to highlight migration patterns as a result of the economic choices of successive governments, and the concomitant impact it has had on inequality and poverty among the migrant population.

2. Migration and Poverty in Pakistan

The Economic Survey of Pakistan (2018) claims the percentage of the population living below the poverty line has reduced from 50.5 per cent in 2005–2006 to 24.3 per cent in 2018⁵⁵. The report claims that welfare programmes directed towards the poorest sections, such as the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), have played a major role in reducing absolute

poverty in the country⁵⁶. Moreover, it claims that the high growth rates from 2008 to 2017 played a major role in creating job opportunities, particularly in urban centres. For example, the GDP had fallen to 1.7 per cent in 2008–2009, while it rose to 4.5 per cent in 2015–2016⁵⁷.

While the Economic Survey suggests that the reduction in poverty points to an "optimistic" outlook for the country's future, other reports have contested the rosy picture painted by the survey. For example, the multi-dimensional poverty report authored by the United Nations Development (Pakistan) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative asserts that nearly 39 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. The multi-dimensional approach of calculating poverty differs from the methods used in the Economic Survey which relies heavily on income and wealth statistics. The Multi-Dimensional Index, on the other hand, considers access to health, education and the standard of living to create a more dynamic understanding of poverty⁵⁸.

A 2018 World Bank study titled "State of Water Supply, Sanitation and Poverty in Pakistan" places the figure of absolute poverty around 30 per cent. More damningly, however, the report demonstrates the uneven spread of poverty across space. For example, the report found that 80 per cent of the country's poor live in rural Pakistan, a staggering figure that shows the increasing wealth gap between the urban and rural parts of the country.⁵⁹ Moreover, poverty is also spread unevenly across the different provinces of Pakistan. Sixty-two per cent of Balochistan's rural population lives in poverty, the highest in the country. The gap in rural and urban poverty in Sindh is over 30 per cent, a gap that has had serious repercussions in the political life of the province (see Chapter 4).

⁵⁴BISP is an unconditional cash transfer targeted at the poorest of the poor in order to improve their consumption and investments in children. The transfers are provided directly to women to ensure the funds are spent as intended. The programme was launched by the Pakistan People's Party government in 2008.

⁵⁵Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2018.

⁵⁶Multiple Inequalities and Policies to Mitigate Inequality Traps in Pakistan", Oxfam Pakistan and LUMS, 2015.

⁵⁹State of Water Supply, Sanitation and Poverty in Pakistan" in World Bank Documents, 2018.

⁵⁴Planning Commission of Pakistan, "Task Force on Urban Development", 2011.

⁵⁵Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2018

In the 'Commitment to Reduce Inequality', Pakistan was ranked 139 out of 152 countries, underscoring the indifference shown by policymakers to alleviating poverty. Moreover, despite the reduction in poverty in Pakistan, inequality is on the rise in the country.⁶⁰ In 1988, the Gini coefficient, which measures inequality, was 0.35 per cent.⁶¹ In 2014, the figure had risen to 0.41 per cent. With the above-mentioned disparities in wealth across regions, the spatial division of inequality remains one of the biggest challenges for the country in creating a stable polity.

These transformations have had an impact on migrations patterns in Pakistan. Since coming into being in 1947, the country has experienced many waves of migration to and from the country. The first occurred at the time of the partition when 4.7 million Sikhs and Hindus left the country for neighbouring India and were replaced by approximately 6 million Muslims who arrived in Pakistan from India.

The second wave of mass migration occurred with the onset of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. The Pakistan government, led by the military dictator General, Zia ul Haq, allied itself with the US and turned Pakistan into a basecamp for a global Jihad in Afghanistan. As a result of the destruction caused by the conflict, over 3.7 million refugees have poured into Pakistan, leading to an exponential rise in the population of Peshawar and Quetta. Moreover, over 600,000 Afghan are settled in Karachi, turning it into a city with the largest Pashtun population of any city in the world.⁶² There has also been protracted migration from Myanmar and Bangladesh, many of whom work in the fishing industry. There are about 300,000 Bangladeshi and Burmese living in Karachi.

The country is now beginning to experience climate-related migration. This phenomenon is already said to have started affecting the Northern Gilgit-Baltistan region which is undergoing increased torrential rains, flash flooding and landslides.⁶³ Research on this theme is only beginning, but, with Pakistan ranked seventh on the list of most adversely affected countries from climate change, this form of migration will become more dominant in migration trends and will require a deeper study.⁶⁴

Pakistan has also witnessed large-scale emigration to other countries. The first wave of migration began in the 1950s and 1960s when many families, mostly belonging to Kashmir and Punjab, left to work in the industrial sectors in post-war Europe. The second wave arrived with the Middle East boom in the 1970s as

the Gulf States sought cheap and docile labour from poor countries to run their industries. The emigration to the Gulf and the ensuing remittances are seen as one of the essential elements that allowed for relative prosperity in the country in the 1980s and continue to provide an economic cushion to the economy.⁶⁵ There are also a number of professionals and skilled workers who are based in North America, Europe and Australia. The estimated figure of Pakistani emigrants is over 5 million, making labour as an essential commodity through which the country is integrated into the global capitalist network.

The growing inequality and dislocation we examined earlier is a result of the shifts in the economy undertaken since the IMF-imposed Structural Adjustment Programs. Two examples can illustrate the consequences of de-regulation on the country's economy. These resulted in the rampant privatisation of major public sector corporations that have broken the bargaining power of labour. Today, less than one per cent of the labour force is unionised across the country. A study by Human Rights Watch shows how the government's attempts to make Pakistan an ideal site for foreign investment has led to repressive laws for the workforce, including unpaid working hours and lack of workplace safety regulations.

Worse still, the labour department and labour courts are easily influenced by industrialists who often bribe state officials. With the erosion of the bargaining power of workers and the rise of a speculative economy, the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow exponentially.⁶⁶ Moreover, loan repayments to international and local creditors, as well the country's bloated military budget suggest that spending on the social sector will remain abysmally low.

The situation has only become worse as Pakistan accepted another IMF bailout package, the 13th in the country's history. The IMF has demanded cuts in public health and public education, with the latter already slashed by 50 per cent. Moreover, the prices of petrol, gas and electricity have risen, creating further financial precarity for poor households. The State Bank estimates that the country will continue to experience low growth for at least the next two years, an explosive situation considering that over a million young people are entering the job market annually. An IMF bailout package appears a stop-gap measure, but may not be enough to spur growth or make necessary investments in the social sector.

Apart from the IMF package, Pakistan is increasingly dependent on Chinese loans and investments under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor Project. While

⁶⁰'Commitment to Reduce Inequality', Oxfam International, 2018.

⁶¹'Multiple Inequalities and Policies to Mitigate Inequality Traps in Pakistan', Oxfam Pakistan and LUMS, 2015.

⁶²Hasan, Arif. "Migrations, Small Towns and Social Transformations in Pakistan" in *Environment and Urbanization*, 2010.

⁶³'Climate Change and Migration in Pakistan' in *The Diplomat*, 2017.

⁶⁴'Global Climate Risk Index', GermanWatch, 2017.

⁶⁵Hasan, Arif. "Migrations, Small Towns and Social Transformations in Pakistan" in *Environment and Urbanization*, 2010.

⁶⁶'No Room to Bargain: Unfair and Abusive Labor Practices in Pakistan', Human Rights Watch. 2019.

the project promises to be a central feature in Pakistan's economic future, there are also worries that there is a Chinese debt trap brewing for the Pakistani state. Current estimates show that soon Pakistan will be forced to pay an annual rate of 3.5 billion dollars in debt repayment to the Chinese banks that are financing the corridor.

3 Rural Distress and Migration

The capital-intensive techniques introduced by the Green Revolution in the 1960s, commercialised agricultural land, including the use of High Yielding Varieties (HYV) of food grains. It also made access to technologies such as tractors and tube wells an essential element for economic prosperity. As a result, there was a concentration of land and wealth in the hands of those who could afford it, as many small land-owners and tenants failed to compete with those who had access to modern machinery.⁶⁷ Today, over 50 per cent of the rural population is landless, fuelling migration to small towns and urban centres for employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the desire to produce value-added goods as a way of overcoming economic stagnation (as well as the recurrent balance of payment crisis) has come at the cost of neglecting development in the country's rural areas. For example, the reduction of subsidies on agriculture has disproportionately affected small farmers, who are now beholden to middle-men and local money lenders for survival.⁶⁸ This is a direct result of the privatisation of the banking sector in the late 80s and early 90s, a move that deregulated the sector and made banks only answerable to their shareholders. In 1985, 90 per cent of banking credit was available to the industrial and agricultural sectors. Today, only 10 per cent is available for these sectors, providing access only to industrial tycoons or the landed gentry.

Rural areas faced another massive disadvantage when they bore the brunt of load-shedding throughout the country, with certain rural districts experiencing 18 hours without the supply of electricity per day in 2011. This infrastructural breakdown not only had an adverse impact on the quality of life but also played havoc with the nascent businesses emerging in rural districts of the country. According to a World Bank Report titled "Electrification and Household Welfare", power outages cost Pakistan approximately 5.8 billion dollars per year (2.6 % of the GDP), impacting the livelihoods of millions of poor households.⁶⁹

In short, it was this financial asphyxiation that has increasingly made life unbearable in the villages and

has significantly reduced prospects for dignified work in the villages. On top of these economic problems, the almost complete lack of facilities for higher education and health (which are centred in major cities) as well as the increasing problem of climate change and weather disruption, have drastically reduced the opportunities for personal or social advancement in the countryside. This explains why 80 per cent of the country's poor live in rural Pakistan, propelling thousands to the cities in search of livelihood.⁷⁰

4. Internal Migration Patterns

According to the 1998 census, 66 per cent of internal migration occurred to urban areas. According to a study by Shahnaz and Khan, 43 per cent of migrants cited "Moving with household head" as the primary reason for migration, while 17 per cent of the respondents cited marriage, followed by employment (12 per cent) and business (9 per cent).

As discussed earlier, poverty is a major contributor to internal migration as workers from labour abundant regions move towards urban centres where there is a demand for labour. According to a study by Harris Gazdar, urban centres of Punjab and Sindh were the primary recipients of internal migrants. Lahore, Rawalpindi and Karachi alone for 33 per cent of the migrants who moved to cities from rural areas. While details of the migration patterns remain scarce, migration to urban centres for finding employment presents the strongest evidence of unequal distribution of resources across class and region. This migration often takes place by mobilising informal social networks of kinship that facilitate the entrance of migrants to cities.

Yet, many other factors lead to internal migration that need to be discussed as well. For example, pastoralist communities and seasonal migrants make up a sizeable section of internal migrants. There are a number of pastoral communities in Balochistan and Sindh that move with their livestock to search for grazing and to bring their livestock to the market. Similarly, nomadic communities take up employment in rural areas in the harvest season as demand for seasonal labour exponentially increases during this period.

5. International Migration Patterns

Pakistan has seen a wave of migrations to the Gulf States. This migration can be partly explained in terms of the religious affinity between Pakistan and the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia. But more importantly, the oil boom of the 70s played an extremely important role in absorbing the surplus labour from Pakistan. This migration was facilitated by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who initiated closer relations with the Arab countries by hosting the Second Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore. Ironically, however, it was his opponent, the military dictator General Zia-ul-

⁶⁷Tarique Niazi, "Rural Poverty and the Green Revolution: Lessons from Pakistan", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2004.

⁶⁸For example, per hectare cost of production (wheat) in Pakistan is 48 per cent higher than production in India. This is due to the higher level of subsidies on fertilisers. Moreover, Pakistan is importing duty-free cotton from heavily subsidised cotton producers globally while local producers are facing cuts in government support. Fears of further reduction in subsidies after the IMF deal is being dreaded by the farmers community. See <https://www.dawn.com/news/1484733>.

⁶⁹"Electrification and Household Welfare: Evidence from Pakistan", World Bank Documents, 2018.

⁷⁰State of Water Supply, Sanitation and Poverty in Pakistan" in World Bank Documents, 2018.

Haq, who benefitted from the remittances that started pouring in from the Gulf in the late 1970s.

In fact, one of the reasons for the Zia regime's (1977–1988) political stability despite widespread opposition was the financial stability it was able to accord to households whose members worked in the Gulf. The remittances sent from the Gulf were also one of the three key elements of macro-economic stability along with US financial assistance to fight the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the increasing smuggling across the Pak-Afghan border. Today, nearly 10 per cent of households in NWFP receive foreign remittances, while in upper Punjab, foreign remittances accounted for 12 per cent of household income for poor households.

While religious affinity has made the Gulf an important site for international migration from Pakistan, there are also serious disadvantages for Pakistanis living in that region. Unlike Europe or North America, the Gulf states do not provide citizenship rights to expats, leaving millions as second class citizens even after generations of work in the adopted countries. There are also cases of systematic prejudice reported against migrant workers from Pakistan, who neither have the right to unionise nor the right of dissent. In fact, imprisonment rates are high among Pakistani nationals, with 3,039 Pakistani prisoners being currently held in Saudi Arabia⁷¹. According to the Human Rights Watch, 17 Pakistanis were executed in 2017, the highest number for any foreign country⁷².

As mentioned earlier, Pakistan has also witnessed international migration to developed countries, including North American and European nations, and recently to South Korea and Japan. In the 1950s and 1960s, migration to the UK stemmed mostly from Azad Kashmir and parts of Punjab. This wave of migration saw mostly men from poor households who took up work in the industrial sector in the UK. They were soon joined by their families and began building a distinct British-Pakistani community in places like South London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bradford. Due to their working-class status and the difficulty of assimilating into metropolitan cultures, the Pakistani community faced racist attacks from different sections of society. The derogatory term 'Paki' was also coined to essentialise and target the Pakistani community as backward and alien to British culture.

Perhaps the strongest contribution made by the diaspora is in respect to the remittances sent home, which are the highest contributor to Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves. The recent downturn in the global economy and the turmoil in the Middle East led to apprehensions that the flow of remittances would slow down. However, the latest State Bank Report states that remittances have actually picked up over the last

quarter and continue to play a vital role in replenishing foreign exchange reserves of the country.

6. Women and Migration

The main reasons for rural-urban migration and emigration from Pakistan are family-related, such as marriage. According to the International Labour Organization, only one per cent of labour migrants from Pakistan happen to be women. In fact, 60 per cent of individuals migrating declare "family-related" issues as the main reason for their migration. This shows that workplaces still remain segmented along gender lines. Female participation in wage employment is merely 15 per cent, as nearly 54 per cent do unpaid labour at home.⁷³

Perhaps the major reason for this inequality in the workplace is the rigid societal norms surrounding women. Women are still overwhelmingly expected to run the household and take care of her husband, her in-laws and her children.⁷⁴ Yet, it is important to integrate contemporary feminists analysis around family, care and housework to better appreciate the central role played by women in sustaining economic activities in society. Its importance can be gauged by the fact that the contribution of female housework in the Pakistani economy was about 25 billion dollars, according to one study.⁷⁵

There are no specific policies to encourage female migration within and from Pakistan. However, since the majority of migrants exist in the category of care work (either as recipients, i.e. children/elderly or as caregivers), any migration reform has to focus on improving the lives of this important but neglected segment of society.

7. State and Migration

The Pakistani state and its political spectrum have been widely affected by the movement of migrants and refugees. On the legal side, the first treaty signed by Pakistan regarding the rights of refugees was the Liaquat-Nehru Pact signed on 8 April 1950 between the prime ministers of Pakistan and India. The bilateral treaty allowed refugees to return to their homes, dispose of their looted property and be reunited with abducted family members. The pact also stressed the protection of minority rights in India and Pakistan which led to the formation of the Minority Commissions in both the countries.⁷⁶

Pakistan is not a signatory to either the 1951 Convention on Refugee Status or the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees. Yet, as mentioned earlier, Pakistan has

⁷¹See <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1958471/1-11000-pakistanis-jailed-abroad-report/>.

⁷²See <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/03/07/caught-web/treatment-pakistanis-saudi-criminal-justice-system>.

⁷³"Strengthening Labor Migration Governance in Pakistan", ILO documents, 2013.

⁷⁴Ahmed, Iftikhar, "No Country for Working Women", The Express Tribune, 2018.

⁷⁵Arshad, Zehra. "The Economic Contribution of Pakistani Women Through Unpaid Labour", Healthbridge documents. 2008.

⁷⁶See Jalal, Ayesha, "The State of Martial Rule: The origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defense", Cambridge University Press, 2007.

hosted over 3 million Afghan refugees over the past four decades. The Pakistan government has concluded a series of ad hoc agreements with the UNHCR that give legal protection to Afghan refugees. More importantly, the agreement includes repatriation programmes to facilitate the return of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan.⁷⁷ The first deadline for the repatriation programme was 2009, which was later extended to 2017 (An extension to the expiry date has been granted six times, the last one being the 3rd of February, 2018). While many refugees returned to Afghanistan, there remain at least over 2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan today. Their legal status is in limbo since the expiration of the extended repatriation date in 2018. The government of Prime Minister Imran Khan has declared its intention to offer citizenship to Afghan refugees, a move that drew praise from human rights group but also a swathe of criticism.⁷⁸

The reason for these tensions over the legal status stems from a history of anxiety and violence over the question of demographics. For example, the entry of migrants in Sindh after the partition of India immediately created tensions between the indigenous Sindhi population and the migrants. This split on migration continues to structure the various responses to the new waves of migration witnessed since Partition. In particular, the movement of Pashtun migrants to Karachi has led to tensions with both the Urdu-speaking migrants and the local Sindhi-speaking populations.

Pashtun migration to the city began in the 1960s when the Green Revolution displaced many small farmers from agricultural lands, who sought work in the newly-setup industries in the port city. The second major wave came with the advent of Afghan refugees in the 1980s who made Karachi a hub of their cultural, social and financial activities. The third wave began in the aftermath of the “War on terror” when many Pashtuns, particularly those belonging to FATA and Swat, were forced to migrate due to the persistent war between the Pakistani military and insurgent groups.⁷⁹ The effects of counter-insurgency efforts of the state have led to massive displacements, with some studies suggesting that the number of Internally Displaced Pashtuns is over 1 million. These displaced communities are fleeing areas that are now under a military logic of governance and where discussions on economic growth are superseded by security concerns of a paranoid state.

The movement of Pashtuns, in particular, has had political repercussions throughout the country, as many families remain under perpetual surveillance even as they move across space. From 2008 to 2016, there were repeated clashes between Urdu-speaking migrants and Pashtuns in Karachi, leading to the phenomenon of “target killings” that took hundreds of lives in the

city.⁸⁰ This sense of marginalisation has given rise to the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, a civil rights campaign that mobilises the sense of hurt and humiliation felt by ordinary Pashtuns. It is also remarkable how this movement has mobilised Pashtun migrants across Pakistan by holding massive rallies in cities as diverse as Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad.⁸¹ Its popularity, broad appeal across the Pashtun community and blunt criticism of the war on terror have led to accusations of treason by the country’s powerful military establishment which recently banned the movement’s leadership from entering Sindh.

8. Policy Proposals

- 1) Pakistan must reject the neoliberal model that has crippled the state’s ability to provide basic amenities to its people or to provide stable, well-paying jobs. One of the greatest challenges will be to curb financialisation and speculation in the economy which has replaced investments in industry and agriculture.
- 2) The government needs to devise a strategy for tackling rural distress in the country. This means providing subsidies to small farmers and low-income groups in order to make their work sustainable. More importantly, the government should encourage the burgeoning non-agricultural industries in the city by providing them with basic infrastructure, credit and sustainable employment opportunities.
- 3) Pakistan should become a signatory to the International Convention on the Status of Refugees to end uncertainty in their lives and provide a path to citizenship for those who have made Pakistan their home for the past three decades.
- 4) Climate change has to be confronted as an existential threat to the country’s future and one that would make any notion of stable work an impossible desire. For these purposes, the state has to discourage more investment in fossil-fuel related infrastructure and begin diverting resources towards a cleaner, greener future.
- 5) A comprehensive review of social pressures hindering the entry of women into the labour market is required. This not only means incentivising the hiring of female staff but also creating an enabling environment at workplaces, including the enforcement anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, to make female employment an attractive option both for workers and the employees.

⁷⁷Marjoleine Zieck, “The Legal Status of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, a Story of Eight Agreements and Two Suppressed premises”, *International Journal of Refugee Law*. 2008.

⁷⁸“Unwanted Afghan Refugees Pin Hopes on PM Imran Khan’s Promise for Citizenship”, *Dawn*. Jan 2019.

⁷⁹Hasan, Arif. “Migrations, Small Towns and Social Transformations in Pakistan” in *Environment and Urbanization*, 2010.

⁸⁰The latest round of violence exploded when the Awami National Party, a Pashtun nationalist party, organised in the city and was confronted Muttahida Qaumi Movement (popular party claiming to represent Muhajirs) in armed clashes. Capturing public land and Gerrymandering electoral districts were central to this violence. The military operation against armed wings of political politics in 2016 has brought an uneasy calm to the city. Yet, the persistent tensions around demographics continue to shape politics and threaten the fragile peace achieved under the military’s supervision. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/19/world/asia/19karachi.html> and <https://www.dawn.com/news/1302425>.

⁸¹Manzoor Pashteen, “The Military Says Pashtuns Are traitors. We Just Want Our Rights”, *New York Times*, February 2019.

1.8 Sri Lanka

Migration Patterns and State-Level Responses in Sri Lanka

Chandima Arambepola

With a complicated post-independence history mired in conflict, economic downturns and natural disasters, it is not surprising that Sri Lankans have become highly mobile. Even though exact numbers are hard to discern, over the years, both men and women have moved away and/or engaged in circular migration patterns voluntarily or under duress. Research also indicates that migration is a process that allows the poor to improve their living standards. People move for different reasons, and Sri Lanka's complicated history—economic, political and social—has given rise to different types of mobilities. This chapter reviews some of the noticeable trends in the post-independence era.

1. Post-independence- Cross-Border Migration

Indicating festering issues in terms of ethnic identity, language and nationalist sentiments, the early post-independence era was marked by the mass exodus of the Eurasian communities who trace their ancestry to successive colonial rules. Their decisions to migrate from Sri Lanka en-masse is largely attributed to the Official Language Act No 33 of 1956 (the Sinhala Only Act) that negatively impacted the largely English-speaking minority from accessing services and work in the public sector.

A few decades later, war-induced displacement became commonplace. The protracted civil war led to a significantly large population of the minority Tamil community migrating from the war-affected regions; some to the urban centres but also overseas – the less economically stable to India and a considerable number to Europe and North America. The waves of migration that has taken place over thirty years have led to the establishment of a strong diaspora community – one that has been vilified and mistrusted by successive Sri Lankan governments and the general public for their alleged support of the separatist movement⁸².

Parallel to this, in southwest Sri Lanka, migration to Italy became a common practice among the Sinhala Catholic communities. Several waves of migration

over the years have transformed specific locations in this region and led to circular migration, as families are able to tap into social networks to seek a means of leaving Sri Lanka⁸³. Since the end of the war in 2009, the “migration by boat” trend focused on Australia as a destination country. But unlike the earlier migratory patterns to Italy, state intervention was much stronger. The introduction of stringent laws including off-shore processing centres and bi-lateral agreements between Australia and Sri Lanka appear to have created a dent, as intermediaries have struggled to maintain a foothold in this highly lucrative business.

But the most visible form of migration overseas has been about seeking work overseas. Since the easing of restrictions in the later part of 1970, a large number of men and women have migrated for work—mostly to West Asia—as unskilled or semi-skilled low-wage workers. The foreign remittances, in particular, has, for a long time, cushioned Sri Lanka's trade deficit⁸⁴. A majority of these migrant workers are from under-developed, rural, agriculture-based communities in Sri Lanka. With over a million migrant workers estimated to be working overseas (International Labour Organization, 2019)⁸⁵ and similar numbers living elsewhere, it is not surprising that remittances continue to be Sri Lanka's highest foreign exchange earner, accounting for about 8.9 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product⁸⁶.

2. Internal migration trends

In general, people's mobility within Sri Lanka is also high, encouraged perhaps by the absence of laws that restrict Sri Lankans from crossing local borders. Rural to urban and cross-border migrations have enabled Sri Lanka to sustain a relatively sound economic growth rate. The manufacturing sector, especially the apparels

⁸²Arambepola, C. & Mahilrajah, M. (2018). Testing the waters? Motivational dynamics of diaspora investment in the hospitality sector in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Centre for Poverty Analysis: Colombo.

⁸³Pathirage, J. & Collyer, M. (2011). Capitalizing social networks: Sri Lankan migration to Italy. *Ethnography*, 12(3), 315–333.

⁸⁴Weeraratne, B. 2019. Tipping the balance: Are worker remittances to Sri Lanka really as large as we think? Retrieved from <http://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2019/02/12/tipping-the-balance-are-worker-remittances-to-sri-lanka-really-as-large-as-we-think/>.

⁸⁵International Labour Organization 2019.

⁸⁶Weeraratne, B. 2019. The devil is in the details: A closer look at remittances in Sri Lanka. Retrieved from <http://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2019/07/02/the-devil-is-in-the-details-a-closer-look-at-remittances-in-sri-lanka/>.

industry is heavily reliant on migrant labour, especially since most of the factories are located within specially set up Export Processing Zones (EPZs) close to urban commercial hubs.

But the civil war also resulted in the displacement of people from the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. War-induced internal displacement reached its peak in 2009 as the civil war ended. For many of the displaced, return home was complicated by a host of factors, including the release of land held under military control, demining of previously war-affected regions and the absence of the necessary physical infrastructure that would enable people to resettle and rebuild their lives⁸⁷.

The end of the war has also generated or accelerated specific forms of forced or voluntary migration. As the government's focus has shifted to economic and infrastructure development, development-induced migration and forced displacements have become more evident.

3. Development-Induced

Though not a new concept to Sri Lanka⁸⁸, recent development projects have raised multiple concerns regarding the social implications of being forced to move. The gentrification of the capital city of Colombo has been accompanied by the eviction of people who had lived in urban underserved settlements around the city-centre^{89 90}. That such communities also tend to represent ethnic minorities poses further questions of social exclusion based on ethnic and religious identities. But more worryingly, displacements taking place beyond Colombo remains largely obscured^{91 92 93}. In such instances, people had encountered a form of double displacement – initially due to the war and subsequently as a result of such development projects⁹⁵.

4. Climate-Induced Migration – A Possible New Wave of Migration?

One of the least understood but growing concerns is the implications of climatic episodes on people's livelihoods. One of the few research studies conducted so far⁹⁶,

⁸⁷Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2015. Sri Lanka. Retrieved from <http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/sri-lanka>.

⁸⁸Godamunne, N. 2012-13. Development and displacement: the national involuntary resettlement policy (NIRP) in practice. 35/36 (1&2). 37–50.

⁸⁹Ibid

⁹⁰Perera, I. (2016) Living it down: Life after relocation in Colombo's high rises. Centre for Policy Alternatives. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

⁹¹Gunasekara, V. Phillips, M. and Nagraj, V. (2016). Hospitality and exclusion: a study about post-war tourism in Passikudah. Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.

⁹²Borham, M. (April 2018). Stolen paradise. Retrieved from <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2018/04/22/news-feature/stolen-paradise>.

⁹³International Tribunal on Evictions. 2017. Case from Sri Lanka. Land grabbing for tourism development, Panaama village. Retrieved from https://www.tribunal-evictions.org/international_tribunal_on_evictions/evictions_cases/6th_session_2017/case_from_sri_lanka_land_grabbing_for_tourism_development_panaama_village.

⁹⁴National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (April 2013). The investigative report on the looting of sustenance lands belonging to Kalpitiya Island inhabitants. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/document/142793606/Kalpitiya-Land-Grabbing-Research-Report-07-05-13>.

⁹⁵Ibid

⁹⁶Tennakoon, H., Fernando, K and Niles, N. (2018). Migration – a last resort or an adaptation measure: a case study from Sri Lanka. Interplay of climate risk, disaster risk, climate change, and uncertainty (177). 3–5.

points to the coping mechanisms adopted by farmers who experience a prolonged drought. Migration to the urban centres to seek a stable income acts as a stop-gap measure. But as the frequency of such climatic episodes increases, migrating away from these agricultural heartlands will become more common.

5. The Sri Lankan Government and Migration Trajectories

In all these different forms of migration, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) plays a central role in either directly or indirectly determining the outcomes for the migrants. In the case of internal migrant workers, the absence of any concerted efforts to develop the regional economies push the youth, in particular, to seek their fortunes in the urban, commercial centres. Ironically, however, for those living in proximity to rich natural resources, the development plans of the GoSL could ultimately push them to migrate towards less secure areas. Similarly, the absence of state action to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change will compel people from these rural “backwaters” to move to the urban centres where already, the GoSL plans have pushed the poor towards the periphery of the city.

But nowhere else is the role of the GoSL more omnipresent than in regulating and thus, controlling the ability of prospective female workers to migrate overseas to work. In 2013, the public outcry over government inaction to stay the execution of Rizana Nafeek, an under-aged Sri Lankan domestic worker employed in Saudi Arabia, led the GoSL to introduce several restrictions. Commonly known as the Family Background Report (FBR), the regulation prevents women with children under the age of five years from seeking work overseas.

Under this highly discriminatory regulation, prospective women migrants have to be “cleared” by the Foreign Employment Development Officer (FEDO) of the respective Divisional Secretariat (DS)⁹⁷ office, in order to migrate. The officer collects data on the woman's family background and disallows women from migrating on conditions such as the absence of a proper female guardian for the children, the presence of children under the age of five and/or any child with a disability⁹⁸.

Branded discriminatory, unconstitutional and a violation of a Sri Lankan's right to choose and engage in a job of her liking^{99 100}, the FBR regulation has become a contentious policy issue for the Government of Sri Lanka. The GoSL has failed to recognise the primary reasons for women's migration abroad which are fundamentally linked to

⁹⁷This is the local level government administrative unit. Development officers attached to different national Ministries work at the DS office in order to implement national regulations and programmes locally.

⁹⁸Ministry of Foreign Employment (2015).

⁹⁹International Labour Organization (2018). Sri Lankan female migrant workers and the Family Background Report. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/colombo/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_632484/lang--en/index.htm.

¹⁰⁰Abeyasekera, A. L. and Jayasundere, R. (2015). Migrant mothers, family breakdown, and the modern state: An analysis of state policies regulating women migrating overseas for domestic work in Sri Lanka. *The South Asianist*. 4(1) 1–24. Retrieved from <http://www.southasianist.ed.ac.uk/article/viewFile/1264/1829>.

ensuring the wellbeing of their family, particularly the children. Furthermore, the regulation acts only as a control mechanism and fails to provide such women with alternative income-generating options¹⁰¹.

The direct impact of the regulation is evident in the gradual decline in the number of women seeking work overseas. But there are also well-founded fears that women are increasingly finding alternative means of leaving Sri Lanka. As Weeraratne (2016)¹⁰² argues, while women's migration pathways through the official means have declined, the number of women migrating as "tourists" to West Asia and specific countries within, has increased.

Graph 1: Number of Male and Female Migrant Workers Employed Overseas



(Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment – compiled by the author).

One cannot ignore the strong gender dynamics that are at the centre of the FBR regulation. That the state reinforces long-held notions about women's position as one primarily tied to her role within the family as a caregiver and mother is troubling. As the GoSL's rhetoric has sought to improve Sri Lanka's low female labour force participation rate, the same state apparatus is seeking to prevent women from working overseas. Such contradictions work against women's own ability to make individual choices – a right that is not denied to the men who also leave behind their families to work overseas.

To treat all such prospective female migrant workers (from poor backgrounds) as "bad mothers" is to ignore the primary reasons that push women to migrate – to build a house for their family, to educate the children or to generate an adequate income to pay off accrued debt and support the family income. Such decisions to migrate, therefore, are made with the children's wellbeing kept in mind. A regulation such as the FBR perpetuates and solidifies socially held beliefs that place the woman within the household and identify her as the primary caregiver of the family – a role that in the government's perception, cannot be substituted by any other individual, including the father of the children.

¹⁰¹ILO, 2018.

¹⁰²Weeraratne, B. (2016). Protecting the welfare of children and its causal effect on limiting mother's labour migration. *International Labour Migration*, 54(5), 59–75.

The imposition of such regulations as the FBR also raises a more critical question: how does the state, while ratifying and adhering to international norms, then fail to maintain the same standards locally? Global attention and concerns raised against the FBR have had little impact; however, they have highlighted the gap between rhetoric and practice in terms of the GoSL's position.

6. Migration and the State

The differential treatment meted out against disparate groups of people shows how the GoSL has made migration—both internal and external—very much a political issue. But it also throws light on the state that is fast confronting a duality of personalities.

As the state becomes more entrenched in a neoliberal economic agenda, it is also becoming more nationalist, inward-looking and patriarchal in its outlook. Sri Lanka's seesaw attitude towards engaging with its significantly large Tamil diaspora community indicates this troubling position. While the GoSL is keen to engage with the Tamil diaspora in order to encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDIs) to the flagging economy, it tends to side-line the more serious, political concerns raised by the Tamil diaspora regarding minority rights and decentralisation of power.

The gendered dynamics within this nationalist, patriarchal state is hard to miss. The "rush" to impose a regulation such as the FBR and its continued imposition despite inadvertently exposing women to be victimised further, shows up the complicated relationship female migrants encounter with the state. As has been pointed out¹⁰³ the FBR constitutes a form of structural violence meted out against women struggling to earn a living by migrating. Marginalised, ignored and lacking the political power to effect change, women opt to migrate to secure an adequate and stable income. But in a backdrop of rising nationalist sentiments, women, especially Sinhala Buddhists, are increasingly being cast in the role of "reproducers of the nation" and the "carriers of national tradition"¹⁰⁴.

The inherent contradiction within the adoption of neoliberal economic policies and the need to facilitate easier mobility, therefore, will have to be balanced against these nationalist, inward-looking positions of the state. But as the state grapples with this duality of personality, Sri Lankans will continue to move and in the face of the absence of policies or the inability of existing policies to support them adequately, some will remain vulnerable and at risk of losing out in maximising outcomes from their migration trajectories.

¹⁰³Abeyasekera, A. L. and Jayasundere, R. (2015). Migrant mothers, family breakdown, and the modern state: An analysis of state policies regulating women migrating overseas for domestic work in Sri Lanka. *The South Asianist*, 4(1) 1–24. Retrieved from <http://www.southasianist.ed.ac.uk/article/viewFile/1264/1829>.

¹⁰⁴Withers, M., and Biyanwila, J. (2014). Patriarchy, labour markets and development: contesting the sexual division of labour in Sri Lanka. *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review*, 3(1), 33–43.

Annexure

2

List of Participants in the Conference on Migration in South Asia: Poverty and Inequality

List of Participants in the Conference on Migration in South Asia: Poverty and Inequality

24-25 February 2019

National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, India

S. No	Name	Organisation
1.	Aarthi Pai	Centre for Advocacy on Stigma & Marginalization, Sampada Gramin Mahila Sanstha (SANGRAM), India
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4.	Ankit Kumar Padhy	National Law School of India University (NLSIU)-CEERA, Bengaluru, India
5.	Arun Thiruvengadam	Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, India
6.	Arvind Narain	Alternative Law Forum/National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, India
7.	Asha Hans	School of Women's Studies, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, India
8.	Babu Mathew	Institute of Public Policy (IPP), National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, India
9.	Babu P Remesh	Ambedkar University Delhi, New Delhi, India
10.	Chandima Arambepola	Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Colombo, Sri Lanka
11.	Chiranjeb Sen	Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, India
12.	Igor Bosc	International Labour Organization (ILO), India
13.	Jyotsna Jha Anantmurthy	Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Bengaluru, India
14.	Kavya Bharadkar	National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, India
15.	Kazi Maruful Islam	University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh
16.	Kevin Noronha	ActionAid, India
17.	Kiran Kamal Prasad	Jeevika, Bengaluru, India
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S. No	Name	Organisation
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41.	Umi Daniel	Migration & Education Aide et Action International- South Asia, India
42.	Zakia Soman	Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA), India

Annexure

3

Note on Contributors

Note on Contributors

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Migration in South Asia

Poverty and Vulnerability

SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability Report **2020**



EMBARGOED UNTIL 05 SEPTEMBER 2020, 12.00 PM (Nepal Time)



South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication

About SAAPE

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) is a regional platform of civil society organisations, social movements and people's networks fighting unitedly against the structural causes of poverty and social injustices in the region and beyond. It was conceived in 2001 against the backdrop of increasing anti-people globalisation marked by privatisation, deregulation, extractivism and capital accumulation. SAAPE's mission is to facilitate the process for establishing mechanisms to ensure people's genuine participation in the decision-making processes at all levels to contribute towards poverty eradication and sustainable development. SAAPE facilitates linkages among and between groups in the region, throughout the global South and with like-minded groups in the North.

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